

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, March 23, 2004** **1:30 p.m.**  
 Date: 2004/03/23  
 [The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

**The Speaker:** Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Give to each member of this Legislature a strong and abiding sense of the great responsibility laid upon us. Give us a deep and thorough understanding of the needs of the people we serve. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

**Mr. Jonson:** Mr. Speaker, on your behalf I would like to introduce 15 visitors from the Barrhead-Westlock constituency and Tokoro, Japan. The town and county of Barrhead formally twinned with the town of Tokoro in 1991, and each year Tokoro sends a group of high school students to spend a week in Barrhead. With us today are eight students from the Tokoro high school. Accompanying the students are Mr. Shuji Abe, Ms Miwako Nakadai, Mr. Hiroshi Minagawa, Ms Debbie Bender, Mr. Kim Kalmbach, Ms Louise Rau, and Mr. Michael Ward. They are seated in your gallery this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Dr. Angèle Leong-Sit, a constituent of Edmonton-Whitemud. She's the parent of three children, two of the children attending Earl Buxton elementary school in the Edmonton-Whitemud constituency. Dr. Leong-Sit is here as part of the Education Watch initiative. She's here this afternoon because of her concern about the quality of education her children are receiving and the funding for public education within Alberta schools. Dr. Leong-Sit is seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask that she please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

**Mr. Boutilier:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, it's my pleasure today. When I first arrived in Alberta 26 years ago, I met some friends that are with us today. In fact, one of these gentlemen sat on the city council of Fort McMurray for many, many years. He's here today in the public gallery with his wife and friends. It's my pleasure to introduce Bill and Carol Gendreau, Sandy Williams, and Helen Gallant. I want to say that they are truly good friends, and it's a pleasure to see them here today.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

**Mr. Yankowsky:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a constituent and someone whose name is quite well known to Albertans and to us politicians, and that is Mr. John Carpay, the Alberta director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. John is here to observe this afternoon's House proceedings. John and his wife, Barb, also have a brand new baby boy who is exactly six weeks old today. John is seated in the public gallery. I'd like him to stand and receive the very warm welcome of this House.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

**Mr. Rathgeber:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure for me to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two guests who are seated in the public gallery. First, Mr. Laurie Hawn. Mr. Laurie Hawn is the recently nominated candidate who will carry the colours of the new Conservative Party of Canada in the new riding of Edmonton-Centre. Mr. Hawn is in the public gallery. I'd ask him to rise and receive the warm response of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 52 constituents of mine, 50 being students from St. Lucy Catholic school accompanied by two teachers, Mrs. Lynn McLagan and Mr. Paul McNeely. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

**Mr. Vandermeer:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 55 constituents of mine from St. Dominic Catholic school. They are seated in both the members' gallery and the public gallery. They're accompanied by their teachers, Ms Sherri Anwender, Mrs. Karen Letwin, and their parent helpers are Mrs. Monique Malo, Mr. and Mrs. Shokoples, and Mrs. Deanne Riley. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly several guests from my constituency who are seated in the members' gallery. I'll ask them to rise as I read their names: Peter Duncan, who has one child attending McKernan elementary junior high, the school from which I graduated; Jane de Caen, who has three children, one attending Harry Ainlay, one at Avalon, and one at McKernan; Liz Miller, who has four sons, one at Scona, two at McKernan, and one at Windsor Park; and Karen Ferrari and Preet Sara, who both have children at Windsor Park and McKernan. These people are here today as members of the Education Watch initiative. They're observing our procedures and are very concerned about both the quality of education and the level of funding. Please give them all a warm welcome.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

**Mr. Rathgeber:** Thank you very much again, Mr. Speaker. It is also my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Stephen Kushner. Mr. Kushner is well known to many members of the Assembly as the president of Merit Contractors. They represent open shop members of the construction industry, and he's here to view the proceedings of the Legislature. Mr. Kushner, could you rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one other guest to introduce who is here also as part of the Education Watch initiative, and her name is Danica Wolkow. She is seated in the members' gallery. Please give her a warm welcome as well.

Thank you.

head:

### Oral Question Period

**The Speaker:** First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

### Government Expense Claims

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government still won't come clean on its big spending habits, which should worry Albertans given that a budget is coming down tomorrow. The Liberal opposition has asked questions about government expenses in the House only to be told to put the questions in writing. We put the questions in writing only to be told we should do motions for returns, but yesterday our very first motion for a return on ministerial expenses was voted down. My questions are to the Minister of Finance. What is this government hiding?

**Mrs. Nelson:** Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Justice on my behalf filed a document. It's called the report of selected payments to ministers and former members of the Legislature and lists off all of the payments that were made to every member in this Assembly, even opposition members: their salaries, their expenses, and any payments that were paid to associates of members.

I also said in this Legislature earlier, as this carping keeps going on, that we have a full disclosure and we are audited on an annual basis by our own Auditor General, who has made reference in the audit report, Mr. Speaker, that he has audited the expenses and reimbursements of members of the Legislature, which includes everybody on both sides of the House, and has found nothing untoward.

1:40

We also have another process, Mr. Speaker, that I think is very, very important, and that's our Ethics Commissioner. He is obligated – I'm going to be saying something that you already reminded us of – that if there, in fact, are things that have come to his attention that need to be looked at, he would let us know. From the last conversation I had with him, there were no outstanding issues that needed to come before this Assembly, so members on both sides of this House have been following the rules and regulations that have been put forward.

Again I will say that our government is open and accountable to Albertans. We have been the only government in all of Canada that releases these documents on a quarterly basis and updates Albertans on the actions of their government. Quite frankly, from the results I think they're quite happy with us.

**Ms Blakeman:** Then answer the questions.

Why did government members vote down a motion to provide the expenses for the Minister of Energy, who with 23 trips under his belt is this government's most frequent flyer?

### Speaker's Ruling

#### Decisions of the Assembly

**The Speaker:** The decisions of the Assembly are not to be the purview of the question period. Votes in the House that were taken yesterday are recorded in the documents of the Assembly. This is

not a question to be answered by a minister of the Crown. It was the members of the Assembly that made the decision, not one person.

### Government Expense Claims

(continued)

**The Speaker:** Second supplemental, hon. member.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you. Again to the same minister: does this government expect Albertans to believe that its spending habits are reasonable when it refuses to provide the spending figures to prove it?

**Mrs. Nelson:** Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I believe that by filing this document that, quite frankly, lists off all your expenses as well so that people can ask questions as to why you have huge travel expenses when you live in the city of Edmonton – it's something you may want to answer to your own constituents.

Quite frankly, this was filed in this Assembly yesterday, and we are open and accountable. I can go through each page, Mr. Speaker, if the Assembly would like, but it is clearly here. It's available, and if people want to read this document, please pick it up or go into the library and get it.

### Out-of-province Government Travel

**Mr. MacDonald:** Mr. Speaker, when the government doesn't outright refuse to provide information about its lavish spending habits, it prices the information out of reach instead. This government wants over \$3,000 from the Alberta Liberal opposition just to tell Albertans how it spent their money on three recent government out-of-province trips. My first question is to the Minister of Government Services. Why should it cost almost \$1,800 just to access information about the expenses incurred during the Premier's mission to the United Kingdom when in the year 2002 over \$2,000 was spent on lunch alone in London on a previous trade mission?

**Mr. Coutts:** Mr. Speaker, under freedom of information and protection of privacy there is a process by which fees are charged for the service of getting that information, because there is a cost to assembling the information, photostating it, and making sure that it is presentable and ready for the people that have requested specific information.

If a request for information comes in that is very broad based, asking for a lot of information that isn't specific, well, then, of course, the cost is appropriately higher than if you should ask for specific information. The costs for freedom of information and protection of privacy requests in Alberta are the lowest across Canada, and it's directly attributable to the amount of information that is being requested.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Again to the same minister: why should it cost another \$1,200 to access information about expenses incurred during the Premier's recent missions to Washington and New York and to India and Hong Kong when over \$8,000 was spent on a car service alone in New York City in 2002 on a similar trip?

**Mr. Coutts:** Mr. Speaker, I certainly wasn't on the trip, and that question has been answered in this Assembly on two other occasions, if I recall.

Mr. Speaker, our Department of Government Services is responsible for the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. We are responsible for training privacy commissioners in each and every department. Those are the people that provide the information

upon request, and that is the extent of Government Services' responsibility for the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. So I am not responsible for every single solitary department that gives out the information through their privacy commissioners.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Given that it's apparent that this government is more concerned about protecting the information from the taxpayers than they are about spending less on their trips, why is this minister admitting that charging such outrageous fees is a disincentive to democracy, to accountability, and to transparency in government?

**Mr. Coutts:** Mr. Speaker, there is a \$25 fee for the application to come into any minister's office. That is the lowest fee across Canada. The lowest fee across Canada. If a member or someone from the public is not satisfied with the information, they can also go to the Privacy Commissioner and ask for an appeal. That is part of the process, and that is also part of what the select standing committee of this House put into the report when the freedom of information and protection of privacy legislation is reviewed every three to five years in this Assembly.

In terms of actual costs that were on that trip, the hon. Minister of Economic Development was on the trip, and maybe he can shed some light on what the member is offering.

**Mr. Norris:** Well, Mr. Speaker, it would be a delight to rise. [interjections] Do you want an answer, or are you just going to . . .

**The Speaker:** Hon. minister, please. Through the chair.

**Mr. Norris:** Mr. Speaker, I did indeed have the honour of being with the Premier on both those trips. The limousine service they're talking about was organized by our department. It was actually two Ford Econoline vans. Our department did a cost comparative analysis to put four cabs on hold in New York City for the 12 hours a day that we were there or get the service, and we saved about \$2,500 by doing the service.

Aside from the security risks not addressed by having the Premier of the province in another country wandering around in New York City trying to get cabs, the reality is that to have an efficient business trip, you have to have your time organized, and your time and your meetings are very important. I don't know if you understand that, not having owned or run a business, but it's very important to be punctual when you're visiting other people.

The reality is all of those costs can be documented. Our department and others have made an effort to get the lowest cost for Albertans because the trips are vitally important for our exports.

### Calgary Health Region

**Dr. Taft:** Mr. Speaker, the Calgary health region has again been caught in its own web of political spin. After claiming last week that an error in June 2000 with potassium chloride led to, quote, immediate and corrective action, end quote, we now learn that a similar incident occurred only two months later. In response the region has put forward one of its spin doctors, the Minister of Health and Wellness's former executive assistant, now acting VP for the Calgary health region, to backpedal by claiming that changes weren't immediate and that things take time. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that this minister was so quick to disband WestView regional health authority for failing to balance its books, why is the minister not taking similar action with the Calgary health region for needless deaths resulting from years of mismanagement?

**Mr. Mar:** Because the important thing, Mr. Speaker, is that we move forward on helping ensure that system errors in fact don't occur in the future. To that extent, what we've done as a government is we've asked the Health Quality Council of Alberta to work with the Canadian Patient Safety Institute to work with other experts to report to Albertans on the best practices that can be employed for the handling of materials that contain potassium. I expect that the experience and the recommendations of other jurisdictions will be reviewed. I want the Health Quality Council to work with other reviews, such as internal reviews being conducted by the Calgary health region and any external reviews that are being done by professional associations, like the pharmacists.

I would expect that the outcome of these reviews will result in health authorities throughout the entire province adopting the very best practices to ensure that errors in potassium handling will not occur in the future. I also expect, Mr. Speaker, that the process will be undertaken and completed on an urgent and timely basis over the next several weeks.

1:50

**Dr. Taft:** Given that we've heard too many reassurances and have seen too many deaths, Mr. Speaker, what will it take for this minister to finally act and remove the Calgary health region's senior management and appoint an independent administrator?

**Mr. Mar:** Mr. Speaker, I know that the hon. member has received similar correspondence as I've received from the Canadian Society of Hospital Pharmacists because I was copied with a letter that was sent to him, and I will table this at the appropriate time. I want to quote out of this letter.

System failures contribute to the majority of errors in health care – not the negligence of individual providers. Although we do not have all of the facts, it would appear that the incident in Calgary may have occurred as a result of system failures. Much has also been made of the fact that pharmacists did not check the dialysate product. Studies have however proven that a tech-check-tech system is a safe and effective standard of care. Hospital pharmacy technicians receive proper academic instruction and their training is supplemented by additional certification within hospitals.

Finally, this paragraph concludes by saying:

Studies have also shown that the optimal place for pharmacists within the health system is advising and recommending therapies at the point of prescribing, not in the checking of drug products.

That, Mr. Speaker, is a letter dated 22 March 2004 from the Canadian Society of Hospital Pharmacists.

**The Speaker:** It will be tabled at the appropriate time.

**Mr. Mar:** Yes, sir.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: why is the Calgary health region continuing its policy of hiring well-connected Tories for senior positions within the Calgary health region?

**Mr. Mar:** Mr. Speaker, the issue is not whether one's political credentials are right. The question is one of one's qualifications. I think it's important to know that association with the Conservative Party is not a barrier to getting a job, nor is it a requirement to getting a job.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for West-Yellowhead.

### Learning Commission Recommendations

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last September for no good reason this government laid off 1,000 teachers, leading to a spike in class sizes and deteriorating classroom conditions for Alberta students. Tomorrow's budget is the government's last opportunity to correct these errors by fully funding the Learning Commission recommendations in accordance with the timetable laid out in the report. My questions are to the Minister of Learning. Has the government decided to fully fund the implementation of the phase 1 recommendations of the Learning Commission, in particular the reduction of class sizes, to make sure that parents, teachers, and school boards once again don't feel let down by this government?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Dr. Oberg:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just in my opening comments I would say that the budget would be tabled tomorrow, so I will not be talking about anything specific when it comes to the educational funding.

In the Learning Commission phase 1 is recommending approximately a little over \$300 million over the first three years of the plan. It recommends over five years that there be put in right around \$600 million. Also included in that was a recommendation for the funding formula to be put in and to be added to the funding.

I will say to the hon. member in regard to his specific question about class size, about teachers, about parents that included in the funding formula is a great amount of flexibility which allows the school boards to spend the money as they see fit.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that over one-quarter of kindergarten to grade 3 students in Edmonton public schools are packed into classrooms of 25 or more, within what time frame will the government implement the Learning Commission's class size guideline of 17 students in kindergarten to grade 3?

**Dr. Oberg:** Mr. Speaker, included in the Learning Commission is that that recommendation be over five years. We are working on that, and I hope it to be considerably less than five years.

**Dr. Pannu:** My final supplementary, Mr. Speaker: given the Learning Commission's focus on improving early childhood education, what is the government's time frame and action plan for implementing the recommendations for full-day kindergarten and half-day junior kindergarten for children at risk?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Dr. Oberg:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm certainly glad the hon. member added in the last statement, which was "at risk." One of the current issues that we are dealing with is: how exactly do you define an at-risk child? Many of the factors that are out there are indeed only proxies, and we're attempting to get the most accurate proxy.

I will say to the hon. member that one of the things we're looking at at the moment is actually language and speech delay. That seems to be the most accurate proxy that is out there for high-risk needs, and we're currently looking at how we could implement that. It does have a lot of ramifications to not just the K to 12 system but also to the postsecondary system as speech pathologists and the like are very few and far between right at this moment.

We are working at it hard. I would anticipate that it will be done probably within the next two or three months. But, Mr. Speaker, the key thing to this is that when we do it, it's going to be done well. It is going to be done accurate; it is not necessarily going to be done quick.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

### Softwood Lumber Trade Dispute

**Mr. Strang:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the World Trade Organization panel ruled that the process the United States used to determine whether softwood lumber poses a threat of economic harm to the United States producers does not comply with international trade law. The panel also said that the United States must take steps to comply with the WTO ruling. My main question is the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. How will this WTO decision impact the future NAFTA ruling in the dispute against Canadian softwood lumber for our Alberta industries?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Jonson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are two resolution panels involved here that are looking at this overall matter, one under the NAFTA, the North American free trade agreement, and one under the World Trade Organization. The issue is whether the U.S. International Trade Commission currently determined that our softwood threatens injury to the United States producers. Duties cannot be imposed unless it is established that imports are causing or threatening harm to producers in the importing country.

Mr. Speaker, back in September a NAFTA panel also found flaws in the International Trade Commission's analysis and have told the ITC to fix those flaws. The ITC issued revisions to its original ruling in December, and the NAFTA panel will make a decision on those revisions in April.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Strang:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the same minister. Will the WTO ruling result in a reduction in duties or monies being returned to the Canadian softwood lumber producers?

**Mr. Jonson:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the simple answer is: not right now. Legal processes are not yet over, unfortunately. So far the U.S. has failed to make its case that our softwood lumber is threatening cause or harm to producers. However, the U.S. still has the option to appeal the WTO ruling. If it loses the appeal, it has to take steps to comply with WTO rules. It may have to redo its injury analysis to meet those rules. If they cannot do this, they will have to drop the duties completely. However, regretfully, we are not at that stage yet, and these legal processes are complex and lengthy and are running their course.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Strang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. In light of the softwood lumber dispute how have Alberta mills been able to keep their rate of production up?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Cardinal:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question because there are some articles in the local papers today in relation to the forest of gold, talking about the forest industry, in fact, in Alberta and how well the industry is doing. They've increased production in the last number of years by 30 per cent. We used to ship 1.1 billion board feet of lumber to the U.S. on export markets. Now, we're shipping 1.5 billion.

So the industry is doing very well, and the reason for that is we probably have the most efficient mills in North America, Mr. Speaker. Our forestry practices are probably the best in North America, and we know how to keep a balance between economic development, environmental management, and fish and wildlife management. But as a government we do not create the jobs. We don't do a very good job creating the jobs, but we do, I think, a good job of creating the environment for private industry to create jobs and the wealth.

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

2:00

#### Automobile Insurance

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A recent study shows that the use of credit scores for a person's credit history in the rating process as an insurance underwriting tool has a negative impact on low-income and minority groups. In 2003 at least 40 U.S. states were drafting legislation ranging from full bans to limits on credit information use, while in Canada only Ontario has banned credit scoring as far as auto insurance premiums are concerned. My first question is to the Minister of Finance. To what extent are Alberta automobile insurance companies using credit scoring as a means to accept or reject drivers for automobile insurance in this province?

**Mrs. Nelson:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't have an answer to the hon. member on that question. It's not something that I've gone into on their financial records and asked them. I do know that they probably should refer that question to the individual company and have them answer it themselves.

**Mr. MacDonald:** I'm astonished, Mr. Speaker.

To the same minister: given that Ontario has banned this practice, will this government ban the use of credit scoring as a factor in calculating insurance rates and coverage in Alberta for Alberta drivers?

**Mrs. Nelson:** Well, Mr. Speaker, under our new framework that we're putting forward, that would not be a criterion for qualifying for insurance. We would have in place under the new structure what's called the all-comers rule, so people would have an opportunity to access insurance within this province. So that would not be relevant at that point.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: can the minister guarantee Alberta consumers and drivers that no Albertan will be denied automobile insurance under the government's insurance reforms based on their credit scores or their personal credit history?

**Mrs. Nelson:** What I can say, Mr. Speaker, is that under this new structure Albertans will not be denied insurance within this province. Now, how it will be determined will be from their own driving

record and their accident record. If they've had at-fault accidents or they have a bad driving record, then they are going to pay for insurance.

Access to insurance is critically important, and one impetus for this whole structural change is to make sure that the law we have in place that says that you have to have automobile insurance can be adhered to. That's one of the reasons we made the structural change that we did.

So I'm glad to see that the Liberal Party or the member opposite at least is onside for the new restructuring of automobile insurance.

#### Environmental Initiatives

**Mr. Lord:** Mr. Speaker, my constituents are consistently expressing a very strong concern and interest in environmental issues. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. Given that Canadian cities such as Halifax are now recycling about 60 per cent of their solid waste stream and other countries are moving towards 100 per cent recycling and reportedly even making money doing it, are there any new or recent initiatives being introduced by your department that would greatly encourage and facilitate recycling in Alberta?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Dr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. Let me start by saying that Alberta has one of the best recycling programs in the country. We recycle beverage containers, we recycle tires, we recycle used oil, we recycle milk jugs and, recently, fluorescent light bulbs. As we move forward, we still need to do more. About 80 per cent of our waste still ends up in landfills, and we need to reverse that so that 20 per cent ends up in landfills and 80 per cent ends up in recycling. As the member correctly pointed out, many other jurisdictions do.

So we've set a goal for Albertans to reduce the amount of waste they produce. Each Albertan, everybody in this House, everybody in the gallery, produces about 750 kilograms of waste a year. To us older folks that's about 1,600 to 1,700 pounds a year. We want to reduce that to 500 kilograms a year. To do that, we have to move into more recycling. We want to move into recycling of electronic waste, we want to move into more recycling of hazardous materials, and we want to move into more recycling of organics. So those are the areas that we're looking at moving into.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Lord:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that widespread pesticide use is of concern to many Albertans, what policies or practices is your department involved in to ensure that pesticides are being used and disposed of appropriately?

**Dr. Taylor:** Mr. Speaker, we have worked with the agricultural industry as well as the pesticide industry, and I can tell you that over 1 million pesticide containers have been recycled. This is an operation that is a co-operation between the private sector, industry, Operation Clean Farm, and the Department of Environment. This program is an easy sell in rural Alberta because farmers are educated users of pesticides. They use them yearly. They know how to handle them, and they know how to dispose of the containers. When you have an educated population, recycling works very well, and this has been a very successful program.

**Mr. Lord:** My final supplement again to the same minister: is Alberta Environment considering incorporating proven to be

effective environmental management systems such as ISO 14000 into provincial programs?

**Dr. Taylor:** Well, Mr. Speaker, as has been correctly identified, ISO 14000 is an international environmental management technique, I guess one could call it. There is only one jurisdiction in Canada that has mandated or implemented ISO 14000, and that's the city of Calgary. Perhaps the hon. member who asked the question was on council there when it was mandated; I don't know.

We are looking at ISO 14000 in the Department of Environment, but we have to set standards that are appropriate to Alberta conditions, Alberta industry, Alberta environment. As we continue to look at them, we will set the standards that are appropriate to Alberta and Albertans.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Interim Leader of the Official Opposition, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

### Student Loan Program

**Dr. Massey:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A millennium scholarship study confirms what Alberta students have been telling this government about student finance for years. The government's assumptions are plain wrong. Living cost allowances, expectations of parental contributions, and the overall plan based on increasing student debt just isn't working. My questions are to the Minister of Learning. When will the government's assumptions about parental contributions be adjusted to reflect reality?

**Dr. Oberg:** Mr. Speaker, first of all, the millennium scholarship fund put out a study about one to two years ago that said essentially the same type of thing. At that time it was criticized because the sample size was extremely small, and the millennium scholarship group said that they were going to go back, expand the scope of the study, and expand the numbers of people that were involved. It's our information that this did not occur and that, indeed, they were actually utilizing the same size sample group as they did before.

Interestingly enough, Mr. Speaker, Stats Canada put out a study about two weeks ago that stated that university today, when it takes into account the expenses, the fees, the books, and everything, is actually cheaper than it was in 1965, which I think is a very good deal for the citizens of Alberta.

**Dr. Massey:** He's been away too long.

To the same minister: when will the government take action to help Alberta students living away from home to reduce the \$3,000 gap between their living costs and student loan allowances?

**Dr. Oberg:** Mr. Speaker, it would be very nice if the hon. member would read the study. What the study actually says is that Alberta has probably done the most of any province in Canada to address this. Rural students, for example, who are required to move to the cities to go to school now receive approximately \$2,250 in order to enable them to do this. I think that when you ask any of the student associations, they will tell you that the student loan program in Alberta is one of the best if not the best in Canada.

The other comment that occurred in the article basically stated that loan limits had not been increased for approximately three to four years. Obviously, Mr. Speaker, this is false because the loan limits in Alberta have consistently been increased over the past four to five years. Indeed, more than a 50 per cent increase has been put into the student loan program since I've been minister.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Dr. Massey:** Thank you. Again to the same minister: when will the government simply overhaul the entire student finance plan and bring it into the 21st century?

**Dr. Oberg:** Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member seems to tend to forget is that a considerable portion of the student loan program is actually overseen by the federal Liberal government. Our student loan program provides automatic remission; the federal Liberal student loan program gives no remission. We allow the interest to be phased in over a six-month period. There are differences with the federal student loan program. We have been working very hard to harmonize the Alberta student loan program with the federal student loan program, and finally we are at a point where it's very close to being harmonized.

2:10

Mr. Speaker, in today's budget – and it's probably just being read as we speak or will be a little later – there will be some significant changes to the federal student loan program, and I commend them for doing this. They have actually raised limits for the first time. Today in the budget they have kept pace with what Alberta has been doing. It's very good.

I would say that the student loan program currently in place in Alberta is the best of its kind in Canada and will continue to be the best of its kind.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

### Calgary Police Service Investigation

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary Police Service has concluded its investigation into a police officer's fatal shooting last fall of Mr. Deng Kuol, a member of the Sudanese community. The investigation and the review by a Crown prosecutor have found no criminal wrongdoing on the part of the officer involved. Members of the Sudanese community are unhappy with the process followed in investigating this incident, which happened to take place in my constituency. They have also questioned whether the investigation was truly fair and impartial. To the Solicitor General: is the minister satisfied with how this incident was investigated?

**The Speaker:** We're asking for an opinion here about a legal instrument.

The hon. minister.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member indicated, the Calgary Police Service did release the results of the investigation. The past few months since this incident have been a very difficult time for many people: the man's family and his friends, the Sudanese community, the police officer involved, and the Calgary Police Service itself. The police service understands the stress on the community affected and has said that it will try to rebuild a better relationship.

I'm assured that all proper investigation procedures were followed and that everything that could have been done to review the incident was done. The report of the investigation was reviewed by a Crown prosecutor as it is required by police service policies in incidents of this nature. The prosecutor has concluded that the officer involved acted reasonably and justifiably in self-defence. Mr. Speaker, the prosecutor has concurred that the investigation was impartial, objective, and exhaustive.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since many residents of my constituency called for a public inquiry at the time this incident took place and they're still calling for one in light of the findings, will the government hold a public inquiry?

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Mr. Speaker, there will be a fatality inquiry into this incident. That is required by law and is automatic in events of this nature. A fatality inquiry is held before a provincial court judge. It is a public hearing open to the media and open to community members who wish to attend. Witnesses will be called, and all evidence will be presented in an open, public, and objective manner. The inquiry will look at all the factors surrounding what happened, and the presiding judge may make recommendations on how to prevent similar incidents from happening in the future.

### Kananaskis Valley Development

**Ms Carlson:** Mr. Speaker, the Evan-Thomas alluvial fan, where Evan-Thomas Creek meets the Kananaskis River, is one of the most important regions for wildlife in Kananaskis Country. It's a home to wolves, grizzly bears, moose, and bighorn sheep as well as the site of most of the existing commercial development in the Kananaskis. To the Minister of Community Development: given that the levels of development proposed for the Kananaskis Valley will negatively affect wildlife in the region, why is this ministry considering allowing further commercial development in the area?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, the Evan-Thomas review draft management plan was put together after a great amount of public consultation with local groups in the environmental sector, with local businesses, with the KID Council, and I myself have been down and met with them on numerous occasions over the past couple of years. I think we have made some very good progress toward some compromises that can be looked at so that we recognize the importance of the Evan-Thomas area not only to wildlife and the ecological systems that support it but also to tourists and to resident Albertans who like to visit that place and don't want to see it totally shut off from some of the amenities, that are in desperate need there. So we are looking at arriving at something very soon that would help move that particular project along in a very environmentally sensitive yet palatable way for all Albertans.

**Ms Carlson:** But, Mr. Speaker, why is this minister ignoring the protests of Albertans who do not want to see further development in Kananaskis?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Well, Mr. Speaker, back when Evan-Thomas was established as a provincial recreation area – I think it goes back to the 1980s – there was always an understanding that on this issue of what would or would not be permitted in the future by way of development or other proposals that might be considered, there would always be an opportunity to review it at an important time in the history and development of that area. That time did come a couple of years ago, and that's what's being done.

But I want to assure the member that the policy that we are adhering to, the Kananaskis recreation policy, will be followed. It specifically says that there will not be any large-scale new developments allowed in that area, but there will be some consideration given to some small expansions to existing facilities so that we can accommodate the tremendous growth needs of the area and of people who want to visit that absolutely gorgeous jewel in the Canadian Rockies area.

**Ms Carlson:** Mr. Speaker, will the ministry expand surrounding provincial parks and wild-lands to protect this sensitive area from further commercial development?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, that's one of the best questions I've had in this regard, and it's a very good one. As part of the compromises and in sort of coming together on this issue with many groups, we have looked at how we might alleviate some of the concerns. One of them would be if we allow some type of an expansion, on the one hand, to existing facilities, which would help not only the tourism industry but also the important staff members who service the Evan-Thomas facilities that currently exist, but also to take a look at what we might do by way of including some other areas that would be desirable for expansion such as the hon. member is referring to. So we'll be getting back to the Assembly very soon with some further indications of what we're planning to do there, but I do thank the hon. member for a very good question.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

### Health Care Premiums

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Health care premiums are a regressive tax that hurts seniors, middle-class families, and working Albertans. Scrapping premiums will put over \$900 million directly into Albertans' pockets, saving \$1,056 per year for a typical family, yet the priority of this government is to keep implementing a multiyear \$1 billion tax cut for large and profitable corporations. My question is to the Minister of Finance. Why is the government's priority to keep cutting corporate taxes at the expense of scrapping health care premiums, which would provide far greater benefit for average Albertan families?

**Mrs. Nelson:** Mr. Speaker, I read the member opposite's press release again today, and I have to be honest with you.

**An Hon. Member:** Which one?

**Mrs. Nelson:** Which one? They put them out by the dozen, and they all say absolutely nothing.

Insofar as taxes are concerned, this current year, that we're under right now, saw Albertans receive the benefit of us protecting them from the indexation of the personal income tax to make sure that Albertans have the lowest personal tax in the country, and we've done that very successfully. We are the only province, I can say again for individuals, that doesn't have a sales tax. That's a huge advantage for Albertans.

**Mr. Mason:** Mr. Speaker, why doesn't the Minister of Finance admit that a \$1,056 health care premium bill for a typical family is a huge tax that is paid primarily by people who can't afford it?

**Mrs. Nelson:** Well, Mr. Speaker, our job here is to provide a package for Albertans that is one that provides them with core programs and a quality of life that we believe is the best in the country, and that's a balance. It's a balance of making sure that we profile certain areas, such as health and education, but also making sure that our fees and charges and taxes are the lowest overall in the country. Quite frankly, we've been successful in doing just that.

2:20

**Mr. Mason:** Mr. Speaker, why has the government let down

Alberta's senior citizens again by failing to scrap health care premiums for all seniors at a modest cost of only \$90 million in lost revenue, preferring instead to keep cutting corporations' taxes?

**Mrs. Nelson:** Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to get into the particulars because we are bringing a budget down tomorrow, and this little game that comes from the opposite side on a regular basis before we bring down financial statements is just that: it's a little game. So we're not going to fall into the game that's being played, but I can tell you that I believe that what we will be presenting tomorrow meets the needs of Albertans, quite frankly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

#### Contaminated Groundwater from Ogden Rail Site

**Mr. Cao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Part of my constituency is greatly concerned about an underground plume that has been migrating away from the contaminated site of the Ogden rail site into the community. I understand that Alberta Environment has been aware of this contamination since 1999, and it continues to spread into the community and toward the river. My question today is to the Minister of Environment. Why after five years are residents in my community still exposed to the toxic vapours that are associated with the contaminated groundwater?

**Dr. Taylor:** Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a serious issue, and the member is correct: we have some problems in that area. We have been working with the Calgary regional health authority to ensure that CP Rail is living up to its responsibilities and fulfills its responsibilities to the residents.

Currently concerns, as the member has identified, have been raised, Mr. Speaker, about possible health issues related to off-site contamination. That off-site contamination would take the form of vapours actually happening in people's basements. What we have insisted on and where these vapours are detected, CP Rail is putting in something called subslab depressurization units. These subslab depressurization units vent the vapours out of the affected basements, and this actually works. When these units are installed, the basements are vented and there are no more vapours in the basements.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Cao:** Thank you. My second question is to the same minister. Given that many residents have used the devices in their basements to remove the vapours, my question is: what is your department doing to ensure that all affected homes are identified and outfitted with the devices?

**Dr. Taylor:** Well, we need to put the number of homes in context. I mean, if it's your home, it's important and significant, but overall, Mr. Speaker, the total number of homes affected is about 35 homes. As I said, for those 35 families this is a significant issue.

So I can tell you that the testing for vapours in these homes is continuous, and CP Rail is actively testing the groundwater around the community. We've insisted on that to determine the extent of the contamination, where it is, how much there is of it, and that is actually happening right now.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Cao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the same minister. What is your department doing to ensure that there is no further contamination leaving the CP Rail site?

**Dr. Taylor:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the member has touched on an important point. Alberta Environment has required – this is not an option – CP Rail to place a barrier on the site to stop any further migration of the toxic materials off the site. So we've stopped it. To make sure that is happening, we require CP Rail to test any groundwater that does leave the site. So we know exactly what's happening around that site. Results to date have indicated that the barrier is working. The contamination is contained. It is not leaving the site. What we have to do is work on cleaning up the existing contamination. There is a 1-800 number that the residents can call if they wish to find out more information, and that 1-800 number is available at their MLA's office.

#### Transportation Department Survey

**Mr. Bonner:** Mr. Speaker, in 2003 Banister Research & Consulting Inc. conducted a client satisfaction survey for Alberta Transportation. To the Minister of Transportation: what was the mandate of this survey?\*

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of the Banister survey. Maybe he can give me more details.

**Mr. Bonner:** Since the minister is not familiar with this survey that was conducted by Alberta Transportation, perhaps he could give me answers to my following two questions once he's had an opportunity to look at the information. Those questions would be: could the minister forward to us the cost of this survey to the Alberta taxpayer, and when will the results of this survey be publicly released?

Thank you.

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, I shall endeavour to bring that information forward. We do a fair amount of work in the department through various consulting agencies, including engineers, looking at various plans for Alberta Transportation well into the future. I'll get that information to the House.

**The Speaker:** Well, that worked well.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

#### Identity Theft

**Mr. McClelland:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Solicitor General. Identity theft occurs when someone steals the identity of an unsuspecting victim. The thief then empties the bank accounts, runs up credit cards, and generally ruins the credit reputation of the victim. Last month someone stole credit files and personal information of 1,400 Canadians, many of whom were Albertans, as the result of a security breach at Equifax Canada. My question: what is being done by the Solicitor General to ensure that law enforcement considers identity theft to be a serious crime?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Solicitor General.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member brings up a good question. Obviously, the department and the police in this province are very, very concerned about identity theft. Albertans take their privacy very seriously. Identity theft and, in this case, cybercrime are fraud, and all police services treat these incidents of crime very, very seriously.

\*See page 678, right column, paragraph 11



We must keep in mind, Mr. Speaker, that crime is becoming more high tech and sophisticated. We will be announcing a significant increase in police funding in the provincial budget tomorrow to help provide police with more tools to keep up with this type of crime. The Alberta Solicitor General is currently working with other government departments and the federal government on a cross-government strategy to combat cybercrime. Lastly, we'll continue to push the federal government for a national strategy because these are crimes that have no borders.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. McClelland:** Thank you. My first supplemental is to the Attorney General. Are maximum penalties for identity theft sufficient to deter criminals?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member has referred to, there are provisions under the Criminal Code which would come into play with respect to areas of identity theft. The first which comes to mind would be the charge of personation which would carry, if I'm not mistaken, a penalty of up to 10 years in prison. Other charges might be available in the areas of fraud, false pretenses, false statements, uttering forged documents. All of those carry rather significant maximum penalties.

The trick, of course, is to get the appropriate penalty in place. Crown prosecutors, in taking these cases to court, consider them very, very serious because we're seeing more of an impact from identity theft situations, particularly with the onset of the use of the Internet. Our special prosecutions branch handles these cases, tends to aggressively prosecute them and try and get actual jail sentences attached to convictions in this area. So, yes, the maximum penalty is there. The trick is getting it put in place with respect to these crimes.

Of course, as the hon. Solicitor General mentioned and as I just mentioned, we have the special prosecutions branch, and we have a cybercrimes prosecutor specifically dedicated to looking at areas of Internet crime and crime using computer technology and information technology. That's very closely intertwined with this whole area of identity theft.

So we're taking it very seriously, we prosecute it aggressively, and we attempt to get very solid penalties in order to deter other citizens from engaging in this area.

2:30

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. McClelland:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental is to the Minister of Government Services. Is our government being proactive in educating Albertans about the threat posed by identity theft?

**Mr. Coutts:** Mr. Speaker, the quick answer to that is yes. We tend to kind of complete the picture here in terms of Albertans whose identities or assets have been stolen. What we do in Alberta Government Services is we offer a tipsheet for them as to how to get themselves out of the predicament that someone else has put them in.

Alberta Government Services has gotten together with all of the consumer protection ministers from across Canada and put together a national identity theft kit. What this national identity theft kit does is it provides a standard form that's used all across Canada by people who have had their identity taken away from them. It provides a

standard form for them to reach out to credit card companies, to banks, financial institutions and to take this form and process it to clear their name.

In addition to that, Alberta Government Services has just embarked on a new highly secure driver's licence card as well as the process and the delivery of that card that helps preserve people's identity. The last thing that we are involved in, Mr. Speaker, is that when you go to get your driver's licence, there is a stricter enforcement into proving who you are before you can apply for that driver's licence.

So those are the things that we are doing in Government Services to protect people's identity.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, 30 seconds from now I'll call upon the first of four members to participate in Members' Statements, but let me say, first of all, thank you to all members today. Shorter questions have led to shorter answers, and we were able to deal with 14 different sets of questions, and that's appreciated.

head: **Members' Statements**

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

### **Bernie and Sheila Inman**

**Mr. Ducharme:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On March 8, 2004, Bernie and Sheila Inman launched a very important safety video. In 1994 while working in the petroleum industry, Bernie Inman was critically injured and, as a result, is now confined to a wheelchair. His video *The Other Side* dramatically re-creates the incident and traces the impact of the accident on his wife, Sheila, and his coworker Al.

Since his accident Bernie and Sheila have become ambassadors for workplace safety. They have travelled throughout Alberta and Saskatchewan sharing their story and raising awareness about the importance of workplace safety. Their courage and commitment to this cause and each other are truly amazing.

Bernie and Sheila have been working closely with the Job Skills Safety Society to promote workplace safety. This society works tirelessly to address the unacceptable number of workplace injuries and fatalities and to ensure that young workers are properly trained for safety before they enter the workforce.

To accomplish their mission, they have designed JobSafe, an award-winning workplace safety training program. JobSafe educates youth about workplace health and safety issues, promotes the development of a positive attitude towards safety, and gives our youth a solid foundation for future workplace training.

I also thank EnCana, Talisman, and Toromont Process Systems for sponsoring and hosting this event. They are truly industry leaders in workplace safety awareness.

Alberta has set a record low for lost-time claim rates in 2002, and we are looking at setting another record for 2003. It is very exciting to see the work of Bernie, Sheila, and the Job Skills Safety Society pay off.

Workplace safety is everyone's responsibility. Government has to set standards and enforce them. Employers need to integrate safety into all their operations. Workers need to take personal responsibility for themselves and their coworkers.

It is time for everyone to choose safe, not sorry, and as Bernie puts it: Safety Starts with Awareness; Awareness Starts with You.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

### Alberta Athletes

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to recognize some of Alberta's outstanding athletes and teams for their national and international achievements.

Spruce Grove's Jennifer Heil was crowned as the women's overall moguls champion on the World Cup freestyle ski circuit this year after competing in 14 different events and reaching the podium nine times. She is also the first Canadian woman to ever win this prestigious championship.

Vermilion's Beckie Scott continued her success at the Canadian cross-country ski championships in New Brunswick, where she won three national titles in the 30-k race, the sprint race, and in a 10-k two-day pursuit event. One week previously Beckie finished second in the pursuit event at the world championships in Italy, missing the gold by a fraction of a second.

Red Deer's Jeremy Wotherspoon maintained his dominance in speed skating by winning the 500-metre event at the long track speed skating championships in Korea. He also won the overall title for this distance, proving yet again that he is the fastest man on ice in the world.

Edmonton's Chris Benoit recently won the world heavyweight wrestling championship in New York's Madison Square Garden. He is one of the most respected wrestlers anywhere, having begun his career in 1986 in Calgary Stampede Wrestling.

Alberta's college teams also achieved great success this season. The Lethbridge Community College Kodiaks won the Canadian Colleges Athletic Association's national championships in women's basketball, and the Red Deer College Kings won the men's volleyball national college championship for the fifth year in a row.

The U of A Bears basketball team captain, Kevin Petterson from Spruce Grove, won the 2004 Ken Shields TSN award for his outstanding commitment to athletics, academics, and community involvement. He was chosen over all other male university basketball players in the country.

Mr. Speaker, we are all very proud of our Alberta athletes, and our sport programs do indeed develop great athletes and great citizens. I would like everyone to join me and the Minister of Community Development in congratulating these talented Alberta athletes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

### Weldwood of Canada Limited

**Mr. Strang:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to clarify an issue that was raised in the House last week regarding Weldwood of Canada and IKEA. In a question raised in the House by an hon. member, it was suggested that Weldwood was dropped as a supplier of wood to IKEA because its forestry practices did not meet IKEA's wood purchasing standards.

It should be noted that this is incorrect. Weldwood was never a direct supplier of wood to IKEA. Until August 2003 Weldwood sold a wood product to a local Edmonton-based manufacturer which in turn remanufactured it into a shelving product for IKEA. However, the local company stopped using the supply from Weldwood for this particular product because the product specifications from IKEA changed. This decision was based on the adequate nature of the supply, not a concern for environmental standards. Weldwood continues to sell its product to the local company, but it is used in the manufacture of products.

I wish to clarify that Weldwood's Hinton forest management agreement is recognized nationally and internationally as an exceptionally well-managed forest, receiving numerous awards over

the 50-year period they have managed Alberta's first FMA. Weldwood's Hinton FMA was the first in Alberta to commit to sustainable forest management as a fundamental component of management plans, and Weldwood was also the first company in Canada to have all of its forest management tenures certified under the CSA standard.

They are proud of their excellence in sustainable forest management, Mr. Speaker, and so, too, are Albertans. I would encourage all members to take the time to learn about this company and the valuable work they do in sustaining Alberta's forests for future generations.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

### Democratic Renewal

**Mr. MacDonald:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to talk about the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform. A wave of democratic renewal is sweeping this country. From News Brunswick to B.C. governments are establishing secretariats, assemblies, and entire government departments on democratic renewal.

Liberal governments are leading the charge in democratic renewal in Canada. In Ontario a Democratic Renewal Secretariat has been set up. In Ottawa for the first time in a long time there is a secretary of state for democratic renewal. In Quebec there is a commission on democratic reform, and in B.C., our good neighbour, they are taking steps to look seriously at changing the first past the post electoral system in that province.

2:40

How are they doing it? With something called the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform. The 160-member assembly is looking at alternatives to our present-day electoral system, which overcompensates governing parties and truly does a disservice to every other party.

The assembly in B.C. has met several times and has received presentations and submissions from electoral experts on what to do with the electoral system. Best of all, the results that come out of the citizens' assembly will be put to a referendum of B.C. residents so that the people can decide which system of elections they like the best.

Today I will be introducing an amendment to the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2004, which would allow Alberta to set up a citizens' assembly on electoral reform. I would urge all hon. members of this Assembly to support this amendment. Let's vote to take a step towards democratic renewal in Alberta. We certainly need it.

Thank you.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm presenting a petition signed by 119 Alberta seniors petitioning the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to

recognize and value the contributions and sacrifices the seniors have made in building the Province of Alberta, and treat them with due respect and dignity by reversing those policies that cause unnecessary financial hardship for them and undermine their quality of life.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Notices of Motions**

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to give notice that I plan to raise a matter of urgent and pressing necessity under Standing Order 40 at the appropriate time. I will send the notice of motion to the table.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice to members of the Assembly of a motion which I intend to move.

Be it resolved that since the mandatory registration of all nonrestricted firearms is an unnecessary intrusion on the property rights and cultural heritage of Albertans, fails to discourage criminal activity involving firearms, and has wasted an enormous amount of money, the Legislative Assembly of Alberta recommends that the government of Alberta urge the government of Canada to introduce amendments to the Firearms Act of Canada and the Criminal Code of Canada to remove the requirement for the registration of all nonrestricted firearms.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

**Bill 25  
School Amendment Act, 2004**

**Rev. Abbott:** Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce a bill being the School Amendment Act, 2004.

Bill 25 implements some of the recommendations of the Learning Commission regarding the statutory responsibilities of teachers, and it also makes legislative changes to improve the board of reference.

**The Speaker:** I've been advised, hon. member, that you are doing this on behalf of the hon. Minister of Learning. Is this correct?

**Rev. Abbott:** Yes, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 25 read a first time]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that Bill 25 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Learning.

**Bill 26  
Teaching Profession Amendment Act, 2004**

**Dr. Oberg:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, who is doing it on behalf of myself, I would like to move first reading of Bill 26, being the Teaching Profession Amendment Act, 2004.

Mr. Speaker, this puts into force what has been negotiated with the Alberta Teachers' Association, specifically the practice review process, which is the first of its kind in North America and indeed maybe the first of its kind in the world.

This is a very progressive bill, and I would urge everyone in this Assembly to support it on first reading.

**The Speaker:** I take it, hon. Minister of Learning, that your name is on the bill.

**Dr. Oberg:** Yes.

[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

**Mr. Jonson:** Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to file today on behalf of the Deputy Premier copies of the news release and attached presentation to the United States Department of Agriculture stating Alberta's views on the reopening of the border to ruminant livestock trade. I commend it to everyone's reading.

Thank you for your attention.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

**Mr. Lund:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Health and Wellness I have six copies of a letter dated March 22, 2004, from the Canadian Society of Hospital Pharmacists. I wish to table those.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Environment.

**Dr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand and submit today the required number of copies of the environmental protection security fund annual report. This indicates how much security we've taken in the form of bonds and so on from various companies that are having actions under the act.

Thank you.

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of a letter dated February 20, 2004, from Mr. Albert Opstad, president of Seniors United Now, known as SUN, addressed to the Premier in which Mr. Opstad is expressing concern on behalf of the members of the organization that the throne speech had failed to make any reference to restoration of seniors' lost benefits and is asking the government to remedy the growing inequities.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a letter from Peter van Hal, who's the president of the Water Valley Community Association. He is making note that their community centre and heritage building is being charged on a demand or needle meter. He feels that "the argument is not the rate but the classification and the huge portion of electricity charged but not used, this is not logic, unreasonable, unjustifiable and needs to be rectified."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table copies of the correspondence I discussed in question period today. This is from Economic Development and dated March 11, 2004, and it's asking for close to \$3,000 in access to information FOIP request fees. It's very high. I can't afford to pay it.

Thank you.

head: **Motions under Standing Order 40**

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on a Standing Order 40 application.

### Ministerial Travel Expenses

Ms Blakeman:

Be it resolved that an order of the Legislative Assembly to call for a complete disclosure be tabled in the Legislative Assembly by all members of Executive Council of all expenses incurred during travel outside the province since March 12, 2001, and that each member of Executive Council table receipts for those expenses in the Assembly.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a Standing Order 40 application to present a motion to the Assembly. The motion has been distributed.

Standing Order 40 applications are to be made in cases of urgent and pressing necessity, and I would argue that that is the case. This government claims that it is open and transparent, and this may be true, but you're going to have to fight your way through a lot of smoke and stone walls to see it.

In 1998 the government spent \$89 million on travel and communications. In last year's budget that number had jumped to \$131 million, representing a 147 per cent increase. We've been told by the government when we've requested expenses before that we need to write the members of Executive Council to get the information. The response that we received was to go to Public Accounts. When we asked the question in Public Accounts Committee, we're told that Public Accounts isn't the right venue to discuss expenses, that we should bring it up in the House as a written question or a motion for a return. We bring it up as a written question and a motion for a return, and we are told that it's too much paperwork to table the information.

2:50

Mr. Speaker, this is it. This is our last stop. This is one of the last places that we can ask. I think that in true-blue bureaucratic style this particular government has passed us from one body, from one process to another to another and refuses to be open and transparent with the opposition and with Albertans. They rail against big government, but they certainly like to use it when it suits their needs.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is a chance to show all Albertans that the government is open and has free information exchange for all. Will they do it? I certainly urge all members to grant unanimous consent to this request. A vote no is a vote for big, closed-door government, and I hope and live in hope that this government will do otherwise.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Hancock:** A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** We'll deal with the point of order after we call the question.

Under Standing Order 40 applications it requires the unanimous consent of the Assembly.

[Unanimous consent denied]

**The Speaker:** Now the Government House Leader on a point of order.

#### Point of Order

#### Offending the Practices of the Assembly

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under 23(1), "introduces any matter in debate which offends the practices and precedents of the Assembly," the hon. member in a very inappropriate way, I would submit, in a situation where she is the only person who gets to speak to a matter before the House, tries to characterize what the meaning of a person's no vote might be with respect to her motion.

Very inappropriate to do it in that circumstance in particular, where no member of the House has an occasion to rise and respond to put forward to the House what might be behind their indication of support or nonsupport for a motion. I would ask that the hon. member be cautioned to not do that.

We've seen quite a number of Standing Order 40s, and in each case there has been a characterization of some sort which no member of the House gets to respond to except by a no vote on the request for unanimous consent, but this one is particularly egregious because it purports to suggest that members of the House have some other purpose than representing their constituents when they say no to such a Standing Order 40 application.

**The Speaker:** On this point of order, the hon. Opposition House Leader.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I take the citation that the Government House Leader has listed, 23(1), introducing a matter which offends practices and precedents of the Assembly. What just happened here is a plea in support of a request for a Standing Order 40, and I don't see how it offended the practice of the House, certainly, in urging members to vote for it. It's a free vote. In this case it's requesting unanimous consent. Members can certainly withhold that, but I don't think the characterization that I made is untoward, and certainly the members have it well within their command to either support or deny the application that was put forward. So I don't think that any practices of the House were offended by what just happened.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Anyone else on this point of order?

Well, one thing is very clear. Under Standing Order 40 with respect to a Standing Order 40 application – and these are our Standing Orders; these are written by the men and women of this particular Legislative Assembly and agreed to by them – it says in 40(1), "A motion may, in case of urgent and pressing necessity previously explained by the mover, be made by unanimous consent of the Assembly without notice having been given under Standing Order 38." Only one person can participate. There is no debate. There's a call for a question, for the mover of the motion to explain the case of urgent and pressing necessity. That's what our Standing Order says.

So I agree with the Government House Leader with respect to this. If there's no opportunity for any individual to participate, then one has to be very, very cautious about what they say in moving their Standing Order. The Standing Order basically says, "In case of urgent and pressing necessity," and that is the case and the reason and the basis for the argument.

To introduce anything else that might impute motives on behalf of another member puts that other member at a total disadvantage, where they cannot come back and say anything. It's an acceptable argument and one for clarity of at least decorum and good manners in an Assembly. There can be no imputation of motives as to how any individual can vote or should vote, and no one else should be able to speak for that individual member other than the individual member himself or herself.

I know that in the past, when I sat in the chair in front of me and I had an opportunity to vote, it was no one's business, no one's reason, nor could anyone impute to me why I would vote in a particular way. Oftentimes my reason for voting either yea or nay was probably different than the person sitting beside me. Never ever was it as a result of belonging to a group. It was a conscience decision, and that is the important thing with respect to this. I have

no idea what goes on in the minds of the men and women in front of me when they vote on a particular issue. So I could never ever impute a motive, never ever make the suggestion.

Standing Order 40 is a technique that's available to all members in the case of urgent and pressing necessity. So that's where it's going to end, please.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Government Bills and Orders  
Third Reading**

**Bill 21**

**Child Welfare Amendment Act, 2004**

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

**Mr. Cernaiko:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I take leave to move third reading of Bill 21, the Child Welfare Amendment Act, 2004.

This bill proposes amendments to the Child Welfare Amendment Act, 2003, a very valuable piece of legislation that received royal assent last spring. I say "valuable" because this act is all about protecting and providing support to Alberta's children, youth, and families. Few things are more valuable than that or more worth our time and attention. We are currently drafting regulations and working with stakeholders to get ready for the implementation. It was in the course of this work that the need for some minor amendments arose.

These amendments are largely a matter of housekeeping. In general, Mr. Speaker, these amendments will ensure that the Child Welfare Amendment Act, 2004, is aligned with the Family Law Act, the Vital Statistics Act, and the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act, or PCHIP. They will also ensure that the implementation of the new legislation proceeds as smoothly as possible. That's the overall intent of the amendments.

Members of the Assembly have raised some questions and concerns, and although we've already responded to the vast majority of them, there may be some value in touching on them again.

We heard in Committee of the Whole from the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry for additional clarification regarding the reporting structure of the children and youth advocate. Mr. Speaker, the advocate works with the ministry. The current reporting relationship is direct with the minister and allows for issues to be identified quickly and for resolution to be obtained effectively. This is a relationship that works well in supporting children and youth and their families when dealing with our child protection system.

Under the new legislation accountability will be further enhanced by increasing the number of times per year the advocate must report to the minister. This reporting will now be quarterly. Accountability to the House is achieved through the advocate's annual reports, which are tabled in this Legislature.

A question has also been raised about the advocate's role. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands has asked for clarification on why the child and youth advocate is not able to investigate complaints. The advocate does not conduct investigations in the formal sense of the word. The advocate represents the child's views and ensures that his or her voice is heard. The advocate works with the system, children, and youth to resolve issues in a collaborative way that is supportive of youth. Again, the children and youth advocate is there to support children in understanding the child protection system and to assist children or youth who wish to review the decisions made by a director.

There are a few points around the amendments related to alterna-

tive dispute resolution processes that are worthy of reiteration. Alternative dispute resolution processes, or mediation, can be highly effective and conciliatory means of dealing with conflict. In fact, these processes are already being used to help families resolve issues in a quicker, more effective, and less intrusive manner.

3:00

In response to questions related to the availability of funding for alternative dispute resolution processes, it should be noted that this option is generally less expensive than proceeding through the courts to resolve an issue. We are also planning to build this program on existing programs. In terms of the regulations in this area both opposition parties received copies of the proposed regulatory framework in December 2003 and were invited to seek further clarification if it was required.

Another area where there appears to be some continuing confusion is the removal of provisions allowing Children's Services to obtain child support. I'd like to re-emphasize that these provisions are entirely manifested in Alberta's new Family Law Act. This keeps Alberta's legislation simple and avoids unnecessary duplication.

I would like to quickly recap the reasoning behind changing the duration of an initial secure services order from 10 to five days. Mr. Speaker, this amendment will ensure that Charter rights are protected. This change will also ensure consistency with the confinement provisions of the PCHIP legislation. The details amending secure treatment are exactly as the Member for Edmonton-Highlands has indicated. Secure treatment is a serious restriction on an individual's rights of freedom. Even when that individual is a child, these rights must be protected. For this reason secure services are reserved for extreme situations.

The goal is to quickly stabilize youth and transition them to the supportive follow-up treatment or services they require. This is very much in keeping with the legislation's focus on providing a full continuum of community services and minimizing intervention.

Mr. Speaker, the amendments in Bill 21 will prepare Alberta's new Child Welfare Amendment Act for implementation. This is important legislation that will help us better support and protect Alberta's children, youth, and families. I ask for the support of the House on third reading of Bill 21.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thanks very much. We've had not a lot of discussion on this bill, but we did manage to put our comments and questions on the record, and thank you very much to the member for answering them. I'm sorry; I was a little bit distracted, so I didn't hear if he answered my questions about maintenance enforcement, but I'll check the *Hansard*.

Our concern is less specific to this bill but more that we seem to be adjusting, trying to achieve perfection with the Child Welfare Act in fits and starts. This is one in a series of minor changes to the Child Welfare Act that we have seen since, in fact, we redid the act a year or two ago. So our concern is more about the process and the need for these sort of small adjustments which become cumulative.

We are willing to support Bill 21. We have all the way through and given it very rapid passage. We did not hear from any stakeholders in the community that expressed grave concerns about it. Therefore, we are willing to support the passage of the bill, but I do want to put our concerns about amending a larger bill with this sort of instalment program and our concerns about how that reflects on the whole bill in the end. At this point we're willing to support third reading of Bill 21.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to close the debate.

**Mr. Cenaiko:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At this time I'd like to close the debate on Bill 21 and call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a third time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders  
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order. Before I call the next bill before us, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests  
(reversion)**

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

**Mr. Cenaiko:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's indeed a great honour and privilege for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly an icon in the business world, both a friend of mine and a constituent. Mr. Jim Gray is here visiting from Calgary, and I would ask him to rise and please receive a warm welcome from this Assembly.

#### **Bill 24 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2004**

**The Deputy Chair:** Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

**Dr. Nicol:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure for me to stand and discuss the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2004. The focus of interim supply is to make sure that the government has operating grants when they've not yet completed the budgeting process.

I guess one of the things that's really difficult as we go about talking with Albertans about interim supply is focusing on the kind of debate around: what expenditures are there? I know that the normal answer to that is: well, wait till the budget. But if we're supposed to vote on this judiciously and in the spirit of appropriate government recognition of expenditures, we need to have the detail that's associated with being able to say that these are the types of expenditures.

As an example, in Learning we've heard all kinds of announcements, pronouncements, expectations being set out by the government to deal with changes in expenditures within the Learning budget, but also we need to know, in order to see how that works, what is the appropriate level of mix. As an example, the government has been talking about basically a \$500 million boost to the education and health budgets. Well, how much of that is going to go into the Learning budget as opposed to the Health budget? How much of it is going to go towards the implementation of the Learning Commission's report? These are the kinds of things that we have to be able to look at in terms of: are these interim supplies in line with the budget, or are they in effect not going to reflect relative increases or relative decreases in line with what we can see in the budget?

There's been a real debate about postsecondary education. How much of the money is going to be used there to provide assistance? Students are talking at length about the additional costs of education, the impact that this has on their ability to borrow money, the ability that they have to, in effect, get out and make sure that when they get finished with their education, they're not burdened with unbelievable debts, financial obligations that prevent them from participating as fully as they'd like to participate in the context of the benefits that come both to them as individuals but mostly to us as a society from a population that is properly educated.

**3:10**

There's approximately \$29 million going to Municipal Affairs. How much of this is going to be out there in line with the new Roles, Responsibilities, and Resources discussions? Will that reflect any of the new agreements that are there? Is it going to outline some of the things that are associated with the approach that the government is taking toward providing a new sense of participation by the order of government that's closest to the people of Alberta? We need to make sure that this kind of approach is put in place.

The question that comes up in my community most of all, you know, is: what is going to happen to the expenditures for seniors? The seniors lost both their dental and optical benefits, or some of them, in recent budgets. Will they be restored through this program? Is that going to be part of the focus that will be there for seniors?

The focus also that comes up in a number of other discussions would be: will there be dollars in the budget and are they included in this interim supply to initiate and expand the investigation of complaints by all Albertans about abuse of elders? You know, the elder abuse situation is really getting to be critical when we look at it from the point of view of the number of concerns that come to our offices and get raised about: are seniors getting proper care? Are seniors being looked after appropriately in their homes and in care facilities? These are the kinds of things that individuals want to know and want answers to.

When we see just major lines with departmental expenditures, we don't know where these are going, so how can we comment on them appropriately when individuals ask us? They're not in a position to accept the answer: well, let's wait for the budget.

We also noticed with interest the fact that the Solicitor General has requested an interim supply that is much higher in proportion to what was in the interim supply budget in the last three years. Well, what's going on in the Solicitor General's office that necessitates such a significant increase for interim supply? Will this be used to initiate and start a program for policing standards, provide more support to local communities for policing so that they can put that into their budget? What was the rationale behind trying to make sure that the Solicitor General had such a significant increase in budget for the interim supply component this year when it hasn't been there in other years?

The same kind of an argument is there for Sustainable Resource Development, where we see \$52 million being allocated in interim supply to that ministry. How much of this will be available for fish and wildlife officers? Is it there now so that they can be put in place, in effect, for the summer season when their duties and responsibilities associated with monitoring and checking fish licences and appropriate catch limits will be there? Is that one of the reasons that we do have the additional dollars in Sustainable Resource Development?

The other question that comes up and a number of people have asked is: how are we making out on Dutch elm disease? Will there be additional dollars in this interim supply to support the fight on Dutch elm disease? Mr. Chairman, I've had a number of calls from

individuals in the Medicine Hat area who are leading this debate across the province to contain Dutch elm disease. They're watching with interest to see whether or not these dollars are available for them. You know, when we're dealing with interim supply, there should be a signal sent that says that, yes, these are the kinds of things that are there to plan so that we can put in place the long-term programs that are necessary to implement new initiatives or change initiatives in the upcoming year. When you just have a block number for a ministry, you don't have the same kind of ability to plan.

The same goes for all of the different aspects that are there for the areas of wildlife, wildlife management. Are we going to be able to look at new initiatives, new programs, that have been requested by communities, by the fish and wildlife associations? That's important as they go through setting up their summer programs, and that's what's critical right now. We're getting into the summer season, summer planning component.

I guess the area that also has to be looked at is Transportation with \$367 million. How much of it is going to be used for construction? How much of it's going to be used for road maintenance? Which areas are going to be targeted? The appropriate regional needs aren't reflected here in the sense of which highways will be given maintenance.

I've travelled the province an awful lot in the last year in the responsibilities that I had, and we'd look at a lot of areas where you see road maintenance going on and other places where the road seems to be really not as well looked after in the sense that you see roads that are really heavily used, starting to break up, yet there's no maintenance going on to the same level that you see in other areas.

Why is it that those roads are being maintained, resurfaced, redone in some ways when in other areas that isn't happening? Is this a reflection of negotiations with local governments, local priorities? We need to know that so we can judge whether or not this interim supply is appropriate and does reflect the kind of initiatives that will be undertaken during the construction and maintenance session.

The other thing is traffic safety. We've heard a lot of requests for additional traffic safety initiatives and how that's going to work, how that's going to offset our auto insurance increases. We need to put money into public traffic safety to help in many ways reduce the increases that are being reflected in our insurance. This is one of the initiatives that we see our neighbour to the west has done when they've had a component of their auto insurance that has the opportunity to spend on the public safety, the traffic safety initiatives, and get the feedback directly to the auto insurance system by having reduced premiums.

So you get a direct cost-benefit trade-off, but when you've got two different agencies dealing with cost benefits – you know, the cost is associated with your auto insurance – where do you go from there when they don't have the option to undertake traffic safety? We have to make that assumption and that decision in terms of the public expenditure on traffic safety, yet we don't get any of the benefits by having lower premiums reflected in that same decision-making process.

Yes, we are all taxpayers. Yes, we are all insurance payers. But there's no direct relationship in the decision-making process. We've got two independent decisions there when that kind of a decision should be a joint decision about if we put more dollars into traffic safety, then we save money in our auto insurance. Yet that's not reflected in this budget. So how do we make those judgments? How do we go out to Albertans and sell them appropriately on the benefits that are coming by having this interim supply?

I guess the thing as I conclude, Mr. Chairman, is the fact that as we look at the interim supply process, the very fact that we do this

is a reflection of the government's inability to bring together a budget that can be voted on, can be implemented in time for the fiscal year. You know, why is it that we keep moving the budget back, keep moving the approval of business plans back?

3:20

I know that there were a number of health authorities and school boards that were well into the second half of the fiscal year before they had their budgets approved. Yet how do we expect them to make critical decisions about their expenditures when all we give them is broad outlines in an interim supply and say: go to it. When the final budget is still two months away, what is it that they can do in terms of their planning so that they can get their budget submitted for approval to the minister? They don't know the parameters under which they're working.

If we're going to have prudent fiscal management in the province, we've got to have timeliness associated with that. We have to be able to make sure that as the budgeting process is put in place, the signals are sent out to the agents that use the dollars that are allocated by those budgets so that they have time to plan subject to their fiscal year. School boards start basically in July with the next school year, yet we're not going to give them an opportunity to have their business plans approved until very late in their planning process, sometimes even on into the start of their new year.

So I think it's appropriate that as we debate interim supply, we do raise issues about priorities; we do raise issues about do we have appropriate planning capacity so that we can make sure our dollars are used prudently. There's a waste of public dollars if these agencies go ahead planning expecting some kind of an allocation.

I talked a few minutes ago about the government saying that there's going to be \$500 million available for education and health. What if the education system assumes that some of that's coming to them and finds out that it's not the same as their expectation? They've wasted a lot of public dollars doing planning that in effect was misdirected because of misinformation or not full information, which we could be giving them in this interim supply process. We could be telling them if there are new initiatives that they can work with, if there are changes in priorities that they need to work with. That should all be reflected in this interim supply.

The argument then comes: does this pre-empt the budget? Well, no, it doesn't pre-empt the budget. It tells us that there are processes in place to start planning, and that's what's critical if we're going to be fiscally responsible and fiscally prudent in this province. We've got to have the signals out there so that proper budget planning can be undertaken so that we can have a reflection of the needs of the agencies that are going to be doing the expenditure planning on our behalf.

You know, Mr. Chairman, this probably wouldn't have been an argument that would have been relevant 10 or 15 years ago when most of that kind of planning was done under the auspices of the ministries. But each time we move to create new authorities, new agencies, new arm's-length managers for us, we have to be responsible and treat them fairly by giving them a sign of their budget in time for them to do planning, in time for them to make appropriate adjustments so that they can in effect guarantee the delivery of quality services or quality goods based on their relevant mandates.

Mr. Chairman, it's important that we work through these kinds of things on a continual basis because if we don't, we're going to in effect end up with inappropriate expenditures, misdirection by decision-makers at the different levels. If the process isn't going to work, what can we expect then except frustration, except these agencies saying one thing at the committee level, yet here in the Legislature we're debating and making decisions based on different assumptions?

With those comments I think I've used up most of my time that's available, so I'll take my seat and we'll let the debate go on. I may be back if discussion leads to a good give-and-take. Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to be able to have another opportunity to address the debate around the interim supply estimates through this Committee of the Whole section debate on Bill 24, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2004.

I've just been going through my file that I keep on sort of questions that I always mean to ask that aren't urgent enough, particularly, to get up in question period but are issues that I would like to see addressed. Part of the issue for me around interim supply is granting this money without a lot of discussion about how it's going to be used, just that it's a special warrant. So I do have some questions that I'm going to put on the record. If the ministers don't have the time to answer me now, then I invite them to please do it in writing. It does range across a couple of different ministries.

One of the questions that keeps coming up for me – not often, but a couple of times a year two or three different people bring it up – is the question around the cost of blood glucose monitors, test strips, and insulin paraphernalia for type 2 diabetics and the question about why type 1 diabetics are covered for these additional costs but type 2 are not. It can be a significant amount of money.

Now, if you're on AISH, for example, or I think even if you're receiving SFI, particularly the medical portion, you can receive some assistance with this, but I think there's a cap on it. If you're not low-income and sort of desperate and suffering, you're on your own. Yet there are a number of other areas where there are additional accommodations for a particular illness, and you can often find that those are covered, or they're covered through a program like Aids to Daily Living or something, but never these.

I'd like to sort of refresh and get a current answer from the minister on this. I think the last time I asked was several years ago. So the question for the Minister of Health and Wellness is: why are the blood glucose monitors, the test strips, and the other testing and monitoring products associated with type 2 diabetes not covered by Alberta Blue Cross when they are for persons with type 1?

For the Minister of Community Development, again, a couple of update questions here. The federal government and Quebec and, in fact, I think even in Manitoba and perhaps B.C. there's been serious consideration – and in Quebec I think they passed it – on enacting provincial status of the artist legislation. Now, the Minister of Human Resources and Employment did do some work on cultural workers and did start to identify that there are a number of gaps that our artists fall through as they try and move through life. So it identified them but didn't offer any solutions to the problems. Part of it is that we have to go at this in a holistic manner and look at all possible programs and areas, sectors that the ministries touch on to be able to form a co-ordinated response. That's what status of the artist legislation, in fact, covers.

So it's a large undertaking. It would take some time and a lot of consultation, but given that cultural workers are such a fast-growing sector of the economy – for example, they employ more than 900,000 people, at least 5.2 per cent of the Canadian labour force, more, in fact, than agriculture, forestry, mining, and oil combined. The average annual income of most professional artists is less than \$20,000. I can vouch for that.

So this is a fast-growing sector. There's a large number of people involved in it. They contribute far wider than their own sector. I think if the government's legislative agenda is a little thin, which I

think it is, there's something that they could really sink their teeth into and start to work on. So I'd like an answer back on that.

3:30

There's been some promotion recently around the Alberta motion picture industry. The minister with the pompoms, the cheerleader for economic development, has discovered the Alberta motion picture industry and is cheerleading for them. Excellent. Glad to see that. However, I don't know that we've ever gone back and really looked at the choices this government made in the early- and mid-90s, the effect that it had on the sector. That's when they shut down the AMPDC, the loan fund that they had in place.

After quite a bit of lobbying, I think in '99 or 2000, they were able to get a labour credit that was put in place, and the industry started to rebuild itself. It still has not achieved back the level of activity that it was at when the AMPDC was closed down, and I'm wondering if the minister responsible has ever really looked at the whole larger picture and what effect the choices made had on the industry and where we could best go next. One of the things the industry has said to me is around not only these labour credits but also a tax credit. So where is the minister on that exactly?

Right now the Alberta Foundation for the Arts will not collect nonpaper archives. We're a pretty creative bunch here in Alberta, and we've got some really cutting-edge artists, and not all of our work is produced neatly quantifiable on paper with ink or pencil or in the form of a painting. So for those that are doing work on the Internet or doing multidisciplinary work or where they've archived their work through a video or DVD, the AFA will not accept these archives. So we have no way of keeping track of this work.

Part of both the joy and the tragedy of live performing arts is that it's live; you've got to be there. If you're not there, you've lost the opportunity to join in the performance. We often do in the theatre take archival videos just to be able to preserve some recollection of what the live performance was like. We do have theatres that merge with others. They close down; people leave town. All kinds of things happen, and we have right now no central collection agency that will keep this work.

At this point I don't think the Provincial Archives of Alberta is accepting it either, so we're losing it. You know, it's in cardboard boxes in people's basements, and they leave town and it's gone. It's thrown out and we've lost it forever. So I'm looking to see whether we could get some processes in place to start keeping and accepting nonpaper archives.

Also around that area I think one of the most important things that the Minister of Community Development could be advocating for right now is to increase the minimum wage because artists subsidize their art for all of us. We get to benefit from cheaper art prices because the artists are subsidizing the art, but the way they're doing it in a lot of cases is working for minimum wage, and an increase in the minimum wage would be one of the most concrete ways to help the arts and cultural sector that I can think of right now.

I can raise the rest of these issues when we actually have a Community Development debate, but those were some that I thought I'd get the minister thinking about.

A while back in question period I raised a question with the Minister of Seniors about what the basis was for the amount of money that the Department of Seniors decided below which a senior would qualify for assistance and above which a senior would not qualify for assistance. I asked if it was tied to the LICO, the low-income cut-off. It's not; the numbers aren't the same.

Neither is it tied to the market-basket measure that is available, which is another measurement and one that the government is accepting in other areas. It's essentially for a market basket of food,



the same sort of items, plus things like rent and telephone rental: how much does that cost? Once you establish those base costs for those items, you have an idea of how much it costs to live in a given centre. You know, as we expect, some things are more expensive in rural areas and some are less expensive. Same for living in the larger urban centres. But it does help to set the level of assistance that people require by examining what's in that basket of goods.

So I'm pressing the Minister of Seniors once again to see what the connection is between this or whether he would consider looking at the market-basket measure as a way of setting that rate for seniors. Right now it seems to be completely arbitrary but not connected to anything that we can discover. So either answer the question about how he's arriving at that figure or let's start to talk about connecting it to something that people can understand, because right now it's not connected to anything.

I've been working a lot with students. I have a number of postsecondary students that live in my constituency, and of course I've been really working hard on trying to encourage more youth voting – that is, between 18 and 30 – for those people to come out and vote.

As I spend more and more time with those particular groups of people, I get more information about what are really the barriers to their advancement. It's around a couple of things. Certainly, the university students are very clear. There needs to be an increase in the university base operating grants. I'm hoping that that's going to be considered or that that's included in this interim supply or in this budget that's coming. The planned 2 per cent increase does not meet the requirements of the University of Alberta, which is the postsecondary institution that I'm most connected to aside from Grant MacEwan College. The U of A is expecting another shortfall, which will have to be made up likely through tuition fees.

The students ask for a tuition freeze, and I certainly support that, but I would really far prefer to see a reduction in tuition fees. I'm willing to enter into the debate about having the first year or two of postsecondary education completely paid for anyone that's interested in engaging in it. I think that's where we need to be looking if we're going to be pursuing things like the four pillars that the government has right now. One of them is about learning and innovation, and I think that if we're going to pursue that kind of thing, we need to start looking at accessibility to postsecondary education institutions. So it's not just about university, it's not just about colleges, but we're also talking technical institutions and NorQuest and places like that.

Aside from the actual sort of dollar costs of the tuition, there's the subsistence costs of the rent and food and the other costs for the students attending postsecondary institutions. Their ability to get enough from loan programs is not keeping up with their costs, and that's another area that we need to be looking at. I am quite distressed when I hear a lot about students working 19 and 20 hours a week at a part-time job that really is part-time and still trying to carry a full load of three classes or more at university. I don't know how they're doing that, and I don't know that they're getting full value for money out of their university when so much time and attention has to go towards working. Not that students shouldn't work; that's part of your university experience. But, boy, 20 hours a week is a huge haul.

The students are also requesting that we eliminate the parental contribution requirements for the student loan program – and that came up in the Canada-wide study that was discussed earlier in question period done by heritage scholarships, I think it was – and to improve the remission system to benefit all students, not just those who qualify for high debt loads. So a couple of points are being raised there.

3:40

We've had the traditional leak from the government to the media

starting out with little dribs and drabs about what we can expect tomorrow. We've heard already about increased funding of policing costs to municipalities. Good. I quite despaired that I was going to have to keep talking about all of that for the next year, but that one looks like it may have been accomplished. I think mostly what I was seeking there was a fair and understandable funding formula. What we had was pretty schizophrenic, so I'm glad to hear that that's coming. One of the notes that I had in my file of budget questions to ask was around AUMA's call for the province to pay their fair share of policing costs, and it sounds like that's going to happen.

I have a question around Lacombe. Several small Alberta communities are facing the loss of their specialized transportation, like handi-vans or – what's the one in Edmonton called? – transportation services for people with disabilities. This has become quite costly for small communities to continue to fund. The demand, the volume increase, has happened, and also the actual costs of operating, you know, gas prices and other things, have become very expensive for these smaller communities, but the provincial and municipal support for activities like this has decreased.

Once again we're at a question of equality. Do we really mean it when we say that we want as many people as possible to participate in the life of the province? I think sometimes the government does in fact mean that, and at times like that I'm going to press them and say: well, what that really means in very concrete terms is support for things like handi-vans or specialized transportation for persons with disabilities.

One fellow that I have heard from was suggesting that if the government were considering reducing the aviation fuel tax in order to promote travel and tourism and the well-being of the Calgary and Edmonton international airports, would they consider reducing the taxes on gasoline and perhaps redirecting some of that toward some of these volunteer-based organizations? His point is that volunteers from about a hundred small agencies take the time and money out of their pockets to support Albertans with transportation needs related to illness, disability, or advanced age, but the provincial support for specialized transportation has not increased since 1994.

I agree. I think there are a number of institutions that the government has failed to keep up to speed, and it's resulted in a poor quality of life for Albertans. When we're in a province that's as wealthy and as blessed as we are, we should be able to bring everyone along with us. There should be no need for us to leave any Albertan behind, and I think that's what's happening here. So those were some of the concerns that were raised by Paul Siller around support, both provincially and municipally, for that sort of thing.

Some time ago, a couple years ago, I had talked a lot about funding for seniors' community centres because I felt that they were contributing to lower health costs eventually for seniors because we had increased mental health, and we had increased mobility from seniors that were out attending and participating in these seniors' centres. The Minister of Seniors did take me up on this, and he, in fact, I think, did a study on it. Then I think there was supposed to be money, but that was the year that the price of oil dropped, and the budget got cut, and that was the last anybody heard of it. It didn't reappear in the budget we're in now, and I'm wondering if it's going to reappear in this budget. I think there's a lot to be said for that kind of preventative medicine, if you want to look at it that way.

I also would like to check on where we're at with the wage disparity between the nongovernment and government sectors. I'm referring specifically to groups like the Council of Women's Shelters, the Alberta Association of Services for Children and Families, Hope Mission, the Alberta Association of Rehabilitation Centres, organizations like that, where the services that their staff are providing are very similar to services provided by government staff.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

[The clauses of Bill 24 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**The Deputy Chair:** Opposed? Carried.

**Bill 22**  
**Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2004**

**The Deputy Chair:** Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Having followed the debate in second reading on this bill, there were a number of questions raised by members in debate, and I just wanted to take the opportunity to respond a little bit to some of the issues that were raised. One of the issues that was raised by a number of speakers, at least two I think, was the whole question of the unique identifier number that's provided for in the bill.

The concept that's provided for is that each elector would have a unique identifier number that would be particular to the election process. In other words, it wouldn't be the social insurance number or some other number. It would be a unique identifier number. That concept was put forward by the Chief Electoral Officer as a way of assisting them with the management of information relative to electors so that they would have an easy way of moving information around, and that's about the best explanation I can give as to why it's necessary.

If you could put it into context, you may have, as I mentioned in the House the other day, a situation where there are two electors with exactly the same name. In fact, they might even live in exactly the same house. You need a way to distinguish between the two of them for the purposes of the records.

This unique identifier number is not another way to turn Albertans into numbers instead of people. It has none of those sinister connotations or contexts. It's not a precursor to an electronic voting program or any of those things that were suggested.

It is purely and simply – and I've had the opportunity to have this again confirmed with the Chief Electoral Officer because it was his recommendation that brought this forward – an administrative tool to be used by the Chief Electoral Officer to identify electors to make sure that they only show up on the electoral list in one spot and that when they move from one riding to another, their information can be tracked and taken with them to the other database and those sorts of things. So, essentially, it's a distinguishing number for the sole use of Elections Alberta to differentiate Albertans, particularly if they have the same name or perhaps even sometimes the same address, and that happens in Alberta. We're a large population. As I say, there's nothing in it at this stage. There's been no discussion with respect to electronic voting or changes in that way or using this electronic identifier for any broader purpose.

There were questions raised about the increase of the fee, the deposit, with respect to running for office. In the existing act the deposit was \$200. The Chief Electoral Officer recommended that it be raised to \$500. I did give an explanation of that, but I'll do it again quickly.

The concept that was being raised is that the Chief Electoral Officer wanted to have one more tool to encourage compliance with

the Election Finances and Disclosure Act. So by raising the deposit to \$500, which is still a rather modest sum of money for anyone who is seeking office, then half of that deposit, or \$250, would be returned to the candidate on the same basis as the deposit was returned before. I believe that any candidate that wins 50 per cent of the winning candidate's votes has their deposit returned, so in this case it would be \$250 returned and the other \$250 returned when they filed their election finances disclosure as required by law. That was the purpose that was put forward by the Chief Electoral Officer in terms of why there needed to be an increased fee and what it was to be used for.

3:50

Edmonton-Gold Bar raised a question with respect to special ballots and whether a signature would no longer be required to get special ballots and how many special ballots are utilized. The changes that are being proposed here simply add to the ways that people can request special ballots. Right now you can request a special ballot by telephone or by fax, and in an electronic age it seems appropriate and prudent that you can request a ballot by e-mail. All the tests that the Chief Electoral Officer has in place with respect to ensuring that the ballots are going to the appropriate people would still be the case.

I know that in my constituency and I'm sure in many other constituencies when elections, for example, are called in March, as they often are in this province, you may have – for that matter, it wouldn't matter what month of the year the election would be – constituents in many corners of the world. They have the right to vote, but they may not in fact be back here.

I know that in my constituency sometimes people are located in Arizona. They haven't come back yet from living down there for a portion of the winter. In many other cases I know that we've had people who have accessed special ballots from Lebanon, from India, from various other parts of the world.

It's the democratic right to vote. We should try and make it as easy as possible for people to vote. That's the concept of adding the process to allow a request by e-mail. In a 28-day election I might say that when people are located all over the world, it's often difficult to have requests come in by courier and have the ballots delivered back out by courier and have the ballots come back in by courier within that 28-day period and get them back in time for the election. So going to the electronic process certainly will assist in that regard.

In answer to the question about how many, that's a difficult thing for anyone to predict. In the 2001 election there were some 11,100 special ballots issued. Who knows how many that would be in the future? But the important question is not how many ballots; the important question is: how do we make it as accessible as possible for Albertans to cast their ballots in an election?

There were some concerns raised about access to apartments and multifamily dwellings. Of course, one of the reasons for the amendments to the Election Act that are being proposed is to allow enumerators and to allow candidates greater access to multifamily dwellings or gated communities or other places where the front door is behind some other security barrier.

The specific question was asked as to why the fine wasn't going up, and I guess the only real answer to that is that nobody has really addressed their mind to the fine needing to be higher than a thousand dollars. A thousand dollars is a significant fine. The answer truly is that there was no significant push from anybody to increase the fine. The real push was to make sure that the right to have access was dealt with when all sorts of circumstances have changed and we find different types of communities where access isn't available.

That may be a subject of further discussion from people, but a thousand dollars, really, in the scheme of things is a pretty significant fine. So I would concur with the Chief Electoral Officer that it's not really something that there was any push to increase.

**Publishing of expenses.** Right now expenses are published in a newspaper usually some considerable time after an election at a time when they may or may not be of interest to very many people, but the change will allow them to be published on the web site. I think there are significant advantages to having them published on the web site. One of them is that it's not just a one-day wonder, but it's there for people. It's accessible by people over time. In order to access the publication in the newspaper, you have to buy the newspaper on the day that it's published, and if you want to have access to that information, I guess you'd have to tear out the sheet and keep it someplace.

If it's on the web, most people know how to access the web now. In this province we can advise that the majority of homes, the majority of people are on the web now, and it's very accessible that way. Of course, it's always accessible through the Chief Electoral Officer, through Elections Alberta, if anybody wants to get the information. But rather than put out a considerable sum of money to publish that in newspapers across the province, it's available on the web site. If anybody can't access it there, they can certainly get help to access it through their local library or by contacting the Chief Electoral Officer directly. It's a way of expanding the availability of the information rather than contracting it.

In terms of the increased donations to candidates and to constituency associations, Elections Alberta simply put it forward as something that hadn't been changed in nearly 25 years and postulated that it was something that we may want to look at. But I have to say to the House again that Elections Alberta and the Chief Electoral Officer did not make the recommendation to increase the contribution limits. They indicated that as we're looking at the act, that's something that we may wish to look at, and in fact members of the House had from time to time raised that issue with me specifically. So when we did look at it and saw that it hadn't been raised in 25 years, it's appropriate to raise it now. I again indicate that that's just for candidates and for constituency associations. We didn't raise the \$15,000 limit for political parties.

That, I think, deals with most of the questions that were raised and, hopefully, answers concerns that people have about the Election Act.

I know that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar tabled in the House the other day a letter to the Privacy Commissioner with respect to the unique identifier number and asked for the Privacy Commissioner's comment. The Privacy Commissioner has responded and has copied myself and the Chief Electoral Officer with a response. If I may paraphrase the response, it essentially indicates, as we were aware, that the register of electors falls within 4(1)(d) of the freedom of information act, and therefore it's excluded from the application of the act.

He then goes on to deal with a number of other items, to provide comment, but one of the statements that he makes is that

it is preferable that the Chief Electoral Officer assign a unique identifier number for identification and verification purposes rather than use identifiers that already exist for other purposes such as social insurance numbers or Alberta health care numbers.

I'm sure the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar may wish to table this letter as it's a response to the letter that was written by him, but I think it deals with the concerns that may have been raised about privacy issues or about somehow there being yet one more bureaucratic way to reduce Albertans to a number.

I would want to end by assuring the House that I'm very satisfied

that that's not the intention of Elections Alberta and the Chief Electoral Officer. What they really need is a way to keep data about electors clear and identifiable and unique and to make the changes because Albertans are mobile people and do move around and to be able to track that information in an appropriate way so that when we have an election, Albertans are on the electors list, do have eligibility to vote, and have access to vote in the most appropriate ways and are encouraged in fact to vote.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I think this might be the single most interesting and important piece of legislation that we do this spring sitting. I'm hoping that it doesn't pass too quickly, because I think it's important that we allow enough time for people in the community out there to catch on to what we're discussing and be able to get in on the debate. I know that both the Liberal opposition and the ND opposition have tried to contact some of those smaller political organizations out in the community and get feedback from them or establish a feedback loop.

The problem, of course, is it's a volunteer-based activity at that point. They are very small groups; they don't have paid staff. For them to take the time to be able to go and get the information and think about it and get a group of them together, that takes time. It's longer than a week, and legislation has been passing through here very quickly because at this point it's just members of the opposition that are commenting on it.

I'm hoping that we'll be able to keep this debate alive long enough to bring in that input from other people, to be able to hear back from some of those smaller political organizations who will be affected by the changes being considered in Bill 22.

4:00

The identifier number. I know there's an amendment coming on that, and there'll be a more thorough discussion on it a little further on.

One of the things that I find very interesting in my constituency of Edmonton-Centre is that I'm sort of bookended by seniors and by students. The students, the younger people, are really tuned into the use of the Internet and the use of computers. They are there. They understand it in a way that I never will because they grew up with it. There was a computer in their home, in all likelihood, before they could write. They just get it. They understand how to use that as a tool in a way that other people don't.

Frankly, some of the other people that are not particularly comfortable with that technology are seniors. The regular use of a home computer and the whole concept of the Internet for many of my constituents came into being after they'd retired. So their interest and willingness in taking on a whole new technology at that point was pretty low.

I have one of the most wired constituencies in the province. No surprise. It's downtown Edmonton, and people living in the apartments and condominiums that I have are pretty keen on using computers and on the Internet and even beyond that now where you get into wireless technology, fibre optics, that kind of thing. So I'm looking forward to that debate.

What I'd like to talk about right now – I'd like to put an amendment on the floor. I believe that I've sent copies of the amendment to the table, so they could be distributed at this point.

**The Deputy Chair:** Do you mind just holding on for a couple of minutes while the amendment is being circulated?

**Ms Blakeman:** Sure. Just signal.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, we shall refer to this amendment as amendment A1, and I believe the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre is moving this on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Ms Blakeman:** That's true. That's exactly true. The Member for Edmonton-Centre is moving this on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

This amendment is proposing to amend section 4 of the bill by adding in a long section. Section 4 is essentially setting out that the Chief Electoral Officer can provide guidance and supervision respecting conduct, enforce that election officers be fair and impartial, issue to election officers any information and guidance, and following each enumeration, general election, and election under the Senatorial Selection Act, by-election, or plebiscite, et cetera, prepare and distribute a report. So it's about sort of general information and control of elections.

What's being suggested here is that after clause (b) in section 4, which is adding in references to plebiscites or referendums, we have a section.

(4) On or before January 1, 2005, the Chief Electoral Officer shall prepare a report on electoral reform to be submitted to the Standing Committee that

(a) provides recommendations regarding the implementation of a citizens' assembly on electoral reform,

the idea there being that it would be comprised of one male and one female from each electoral division; in other words, with 83 currently in Alberta, a man and a woman from each of those 83 constituencies. They would form a citizens' assembly on electoral reform, the idea being that they would examine different electoral systems and provide recommendations on changes to Alberta's electoral system.

When the report is provided to the standing committee, the standing committee would furnish copies of it to all Members of the Legislative Assembly and to the Clerk and make the report public. This is a really exciting idea and one that is very timely as well.

I was just reading an article in *Maclean's* from January 26, 2004, *Power to the People*. It's talking about a very similar process that's taking place in B.C. right now called the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform. The B.C. government is committed to implementing whatever this citizens' reform comes up with, even if they don't particularly like it. So that's pretty brave of them.

They talk about it in terms like they're "a new social tool in democracy." B.C. is not the only one looking at this. According to this article, Ontario and Quebec, Yukon, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island are looking at it. All of them have or are starting or just finished either a citizens' initiative or some other consideration of electoral reform. In one case it was a retired justice. In Yukon they have a senior adviser on electoral reform.

So there's definitely a feeling from Canadians that they want to see some changes. The time is coming, and I think that a perfect way of doing it is to have the impetus come from the ground up. My feelings for the Reform Party are not warm, but I will certainly give them credit for having started out of grassroots. They spent a lot of time in town halls across Alberta just saying to people: what is it that you want? What is it that's important to you? I think that's what the basis of democracy is, and I'd like to see a similar process in place. So I'm grateful to my colleague for Edmonton-Gold Bar for having come up with the suggestion to incorporate this citizens' assembly into Bill 22.

I've spoken before in the Assembly about my concerns that we

reach out and capture the younger voters, who are not engaging in democracy at this point. They're not voting, and neither are they learning to vote as they get older and get more interested in how government and government changes, policies, and programs affect their lives. We need to engage these folks. Frankly, when I retire, I really want the people that are running the world to be good legislators and good citizens and really up to speed on democracy. Those are the generations that are coming behind us. So where are we failing here? How are we not engaging those folks? I would hope that if we had a citizens' assembly, we would also be looking to have a fair number of them be younger voters that can talk to us about what engages them.

They're really interested in following and getting a lot of information, which is what web sites are really useful for, because you only have to put the information up once. You don't have to keep distributing it and printing it. The costs are very low, and once you have the information on the site, anybody can go and read it. It can stay up there for years, and you don't have to do anything to it. So it can be quite cost-effective that way.

They're also interested in things like web blogs. It took me a while to figure out that they just weren't slurring words together. Well, they are: it's a web log, and then it's talked about as a blog. It does things like follow a candidate who sort of puts up a diary almost, and people can follow along and read every day what people are doing and even have a conversation with them in sort of a chat room or an instant text-messaging way. So I think that the use of the computer and bringing some new technology into the system is part of what we need to look at with electoral reform, but most importantly I think that the first thing we've got to do is look at things like proportional representation and how we would move into implementing a system like that if that's the system that we're most comfortable with.

4:10

I know that there are others who are interested in debating this motion, and whenever I hear of government members who are interested, boy, do I ever want to encourage them to get up and speak to it. So I will urge all members to engage in this discussion. I think it's pretty exciting, and of course I'm urging them to support the amendment.

With those words, I will make way for others to join in the discussion. Thank you.

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

**Mr. McClelland:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Before I get started, I want to commend the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for making this very interesting, timely amendment to the legislation that's before the Assembly at this time. When this legislation was being debated, it struck me that we're debating legislation that has significant import in our democratic process, changing our electoral system, not changing it in a wholehearted way but in an evolutionary way, to improve what we do in our democracy here in Alberta around the edges.

In the time that we're doing that, there are areas in the world where people are literally dying to achieve what we take for granted. So perhaps because it's of such major importance around the world, it's something that we should have a closer look at and say: well, why is it that it's something that is so easy and seemingly so unimportant to us? We take it for granted, but it's so important to people around the world.

I think that Canadians are waking up to the fact that democracy evolves. It's not static; it evolves. Our democracy has evolved over

500 years, when first people in England sat around on the green lawn, and that became the genesis of the Westminster Parliament, of which our Legislature is a part. So it evolved over 500 years. Change isn't something that we should be afraid of. Change is something that we should accept, and change is in fact coming to the electoral process in Canada. Change will come to the electoral process in Alberta. It's inevitable, and it's inevitable because Alberta leads the country in so many different ways.

As the Member for Edmonton-Centre indicated in speaking to this motion on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, there are at present five full-fledged electoral reform commissions underway in Canada as we speak. By far the most ambitious of these electoral reform commissions underway is the constituent assembly in British Columbia. The gutsy move there is that the government of the province of British Columbia is obligated to take the recommendations without change to the people at the next general election in British Columbia. That will take place in mid-March of next year.

The results of the constituent assembly are scheduled to be tabled in the Legislature of British Columbia in mid-December of this year, and there is no limit to what those recommendations might be. The recommendations will come to the Assembly by way of a constituent assembly.

The constituent assembly was picked at random. Two persons representing each of British Columbia's constituencies came together, young and old, men and women, people of different ethnic and demographic backgrounds, some with little interest, some with no interest, some with great interest. They came together, and what happened is what usually happens in a situation like this. When you ask the best of people, you generally get it.

So this opportunity asked the best of the people that came together. It asked of them: "Look; when you come together to do this very important work, we expect you to work in the interests of British Columbians. What you do is going to have import for generations to come, so give it your best." They're supported by a professional staff and by experts drawn from around the world with different experiences in the political process.

Just as Canada and Alberta do not have a lock on everything that's good and wise in anything, including health care, we should look around the world to examine best practices, import those so that we can make what we already have which is good better. So should we also look around the world at other jurisdictions to see what works and what works better than what we have today.

One of the major concerns that all mature democracies have is citizen involvement, particularly citizen involvement of young people. They're tending to tune out the political process, and that's not healthy. It's not a very good measure of the health of our democracy. As a matter of fact, the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada has made the statement – and I'll have to paraphrase it – that if you measure the health of the democratic patient that is Canada by the participation rate, particularly of the young, then our democracy could use a lot of help, a lot of medicine. It's not particularly strong.

Therefore, I think that the intervention of the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is very worthy, it's very timely, and it's a very, very important intervention because, in my opinion, the people of Alberta are not going to want to see our province and ourselves standing at the sidelines as the other provinces in Canada and the federal government consider democratic renewal.

I think that perhaps democratic renewal is a more descriptive term than democratic reform. It's really democratic renewal. You and I and those of us in this room and in other parliaments are the stewards of the parliamentary process in trust for generations to come.

This motion, in my opinion, is strong enough and worthy to stand

on its own and should be a stand-alone motion, not attached to another bill but worthy of debate in its own right. I don't think there's anything more important than the capacity of the democratic parliamentary process to engage young people, people of a wide variety of demographic backgrounds and interests, in the political process. In our country and in our province I think it might be true that even at election time perhaps as many or as few as 3 per cent of Canadians are actively involved in a political organization. Considering the fact that politics touches every aspect of our lives, we need to engage more people in a meaningful way in the political process. I think that the amendment that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar advanced today does just that.

Now, there are of course many, many tributaries on this river of electoral renewal. There are mechanics: electronic voting, permanent voters records. There are the considerations as to the perception of fairness in the electoral process: mixed proportional representation, run-off elections, first past the post. There are many people who feel that the current system gives us the best stability. There's citizen involvement, citizens' initiatives, referenda. Of course, that brings in other issues. [some applause] I hear a member across the way clapping at the notion of citizens' initiatives and referenda.

4:20

These are populist ideas that are of course two-edged swords. We need to ensure that what we have is judgment, not just opinion, because those of us in this room are charged with exercising judgment in the common good. How are individual rights and minority rights protected and considered? If we consider the impact of minority rights, where then does the majority get the imprimatur to govern?

What is the role of political leadership? Is political leadership doing an opinion poll, finding out what is the most popular thing to do, and then following that? Is that leadership? Is it a principled adherence to party platform? Do you dance with the gal that brung you?

How is it that members of this Assembly may from time to time vote in concert with a government motion even though they may have spoken against the government motion? Where does party discipline and party leadership strengthen a party or weaken it? These are all considerations that must be I think debated and debated honestly and openly and with candour from all sides.

I some time ago read an interesting book by William Safire. The title of the book – and I recommend it to anyone interested in this – is *The First Dissident*. In that book William Safire transposes today's political discourse into the Book of Job, the idea being: where does one get the presumption of the strength or the right to govern? The gist of it is: to thine own self be true; that the role of political leadership is that we should listen carefully to what we hear, to our constituents, and then from what we've heard aggregate interests in the common good and then articulate a vision from what we have heard that inspires us to be more together than we are as individuals.

That's, in my opinion, what the true role of political leadership is. It's not to find a small, narrow self-interest, divide and conquer. It's to aggregate interests in the common good and then articulate a vision that calls us as individuals and as citizens to something great, to greatness, that we should be more together than we are as individuals.

So how do we go about doing that if our society is based on individual rights from a Charter of Rights and Freedoms, if we have a common law base which has worked well for us because it allows for ambiguity, questions that need not necessarily be answered today but will resolve themselves in the fullness of time, which is essen-

tially what the common law is? So in order to become a rights-based or a constitutional democracy now that we are giving strength to the Supreme Court, we become a rights-based society so that our individual rights – our individual rights – trump the collective rights and the good of the community.

Look at the tensions that that has brought to our country. These came in, just sort of evolved. It's been – what? – 30 years or so, and we're gradually working through those tensions. I think that in the first 10 years of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms there were something like 200 or 300 Charter challenges. Last year there might have been two or three. So a lot of these things sort of work themselves out in the fullness of time.

But the basic point is that it's not a sign of weakness to consider the electoral process or electoral renewal. It's a sign of strength. It's something that our parliament, our Assembly will sooner or later be charged with doing. In order to feel part of the whole, just as our province needs to feel part of the whole – and that's what leads to the alienation that we're constantly regurgitating – so must minorities in our province, whether they are linguistic or political minorities, feel part of the whole. Unless we find a way to engage citizens equitably, representing political strengths that may or may not be in concert with our own, we are also going to have to resolve the notion of equitable relationships within this Assembly representation.

I hate to do this, but I'm going to inflict a quote from our dear friend the late Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau. He said that every – and believe me; I see smiles to my left over there, to my far left – individual has the unfettered right to bring others to their point of view, but if they do not bring others to their point of view having had the unfettered opportunity to do so, then they have the obligation to join with the majority so that we aren't forever going back and reconsidering what has already gone past.

So a minority must have the unfettered right to bring others to their point of view, which is what this is all about. Then having been successful, they are now the majority. If they're not successful, they are the minority and have the obligation to join the majority. The majority then gets its imprimatur to govern because that minority feels heard, feels secure and comfortable within that circle.

That's how our democratic process works. A minority gets the opportunity to bring others to their point of view. If they're successful, they become the majority. If they're not successful, they join with the majority and go on to something else in the full knowledge that their rights are respected.

That's why we in Alberta have yet again another opportunity to lead our country. As a matter of fact, some members would know that tomorrow I'll be on my way to New Brunswick to represent Alberta at the New Brunswick electoral reform commission, in which I will be sharing with them some of my experiences in our Chamber, the way that our government involves backbench MLAs.

**An Hon. Member:** There are no backbench MLAs. We're all private members.

**Mr. McClelland:** Well, private members. I'm corrected. We're not backbench; we're private members involved in the development of policy.

**An Hon. Member:** Hold your head high.

**Mr. McClelland:** Hold my head high, I'm told.

We have a lot to be proud of in our province. We lead the country in so many ways. Any time anyone ever wonders about what our province has brought to our country and to the world for that matter, they need only think of the Famous Five. Remember that it was

right here in this Chamber, right here in this city, right here in this province the very first woman ever to be elected to a parliamentary Assembly in the British Commonwealth. That was right here in Edmonton in 1912. So we have a tremendous amount to offer our country. One of the things that we can offer our country is an openness and a capacity for electoral renewal that will bring new generations to the table politically.

We should remember that democracy evolves; it's not static. We should be wary of change simply for the sake of change. Our democracy evolved over 500 years. Change, in my view, to something as sacred as our Westminster democracy should be evolutionary in nature, not revolutionary. We need time to adjust to whatever change we might accommodate, and, democratically speaking, we're fairly young. Not young as democracies go but young as civilizations go. We should take measured, careful steps on electoral reform and renewal, but we shouldn't be afraid to take the steps. Every long journey begins with the first step. Parliamentary renewal and reform is part of a long continuum. It's part of our heritage, a part that we should be proud of and we shouldn't fear.

Once again, I commend the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for bringing this very important issue to the table. I think that it is worthy of debate in its own right as its own stand-alone bill, and I look forward in the future to many debates on this very, very important issue.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

4:30

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise and participate in the debate. I believe this amendment that was presented by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on my behalf will be called amendment A1. I recognize the eloquent remarks from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, and certainly it is a speech which I'm going to review in *Hansard*, and I hope many others do as well.

What we are trying to do with this amendment – and I think it's a pressing issue. We can certainly talk in the future of having further democratic reforms or renewals. Renewal is much better than reforms.

When I looked at the original bill, Mr. Chairman, it came to me that this is an ideal time for a discussion on democracy in this province. There is a democratic deficit in this province. There's no doubt about that. You have some entrenched practices which certainly don't enhance democracy. We have, for instance, the standing policy committees, where opposition members are behind a rope, behind a red braided rope, and they can't participate. That is not in the interests of democracy. We were talking about British Commonwealth jurisdictions. I tell parliamentarians that this is the practice in this province; they're in disbelief.

We can look at other changes that this side of the Assembly has proposed, the changes to the Public Accounts Committee and its procedures which would all be enhancing democracy, not reducing in any way or means members of this Assembly's participation or the people who have elected them.

I said earlier this afternoon in a private member's statement that many jurisdictions are looking at democratic renewal in one form or another. This province certainly has had a very interesting history in regard to direct democracy. It is interesting to note that at one time, up until the middle of the last century, we had a process of not proportional representation, but some scholars do call it proportional representation. It was certainly a different process than the one we have now. We had recall.

**Ms Blakeman:** Oh, that's right. We did.

**Mr. MacDonald:** We did have recall, and the sitting member that was recalled was none other than – I believe it was Premier Aberhart. So recall was no longer fashionable. The farmers down around High River recalled the Premier, and it didn't go over too well.

In the past we've had various forms of democracy, and they have worked. We have changed into the system that we have now, so what I'm saying is that we could change again. We only have to look at our neighbours to the west and the citizens' assembly that they have implemented to discuss electoral reform.

Now, this citizens' committee has two citizens from each respective constituency. They're holding over 45 public hearings through the province in May and June, and all interested citizens are advised and welcome to come. The citizens' assembly was created, again, by the government of British Columbia with the support of the entire Assembly. It is an independent, nonpartisan assembly of citizens who will meet to examine the province's electoral system; that is, how our votes determine who gets elected to sit in the provincial Legislature.

The citizens' assembly, with one man and one woman from each of B.C.'s 79 provincial electoral districts plus two aboriginal members, will, as I said earlier, have a wide-ranging discussion through a series of public hearings. Members for this commission were picked by random draw from a pool that reflected the gender, age, and geographic makeup of British Columbia.

This initiative – I have to tip my hat to them – is certainly unique. I don't know of anywhere else in the world where such power has been handed to a group of citizens. I don't think we should be afraid of this process in this province. I don't think we should be afraid to have a committee like this struck, and I don't think we should be afraid of what they may decide. I think it would be good for the Assembly.

Now, this group in B.C. is going to study many different proposals. They may propose changes to the system, but any changes they propose will be put forward in a referendum question at the time of the next provincial election, which is going to be May 17, 2005.

Now, should we have fixed dates for elections in this province? Should we have fixed terms for the Premier? Should we have fixed terms for the Prime Minister? We have talked about this in this Assembly before, and I certainly have no problem with that. I could certainly live with that.

To pass, the referendum in British Columbia would have to be approved by 60 per cent of all voters and by a simple majority of voters in 60 per cent of the 79 electoral districts. If the voters endorse a new system, the government has indicated that it will be in place for the following provincial election in 2009. Now, that could only be a guideline for the proposed amendment A1 that we're looking at here.

Let's, Mr. Chairman, look back at the controversy that occurred over the boundary redistribution. Edmonton lost a seat in this for no justifiable reason. In fact, we should have held onto our seat and probably should have gotten another seat as well, but we didn't. What was given to the city in 1997 or 1996 in the last redistribution was taken away by this commission. How that commission came to that conclusion is beyond me. There was an interim minority report written by Ms Bauni Mackay.

When you have controversies like this, when you have the elimination of an inner-city seat in Edmonton, in this case Edmonton-Norwood, that is an indication to all of us that we need to look at alternatives. This amendment, Mr. Chairman, amendment A1, is such an alternative.

We could even go forward again, and if we wanted to have gender

balance in this Assembly, we could have a man and a woman elected from each constituency. We could reduce the number of constituencies, but a man and a woman would be elected in each constituency. The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat is shaking his head, but perhaps we should have gender balance in this Assembly. Perhaps we should become the first parliament to have gender balance in the Legislature. Citizens would simply be eligible in each constituency to vote for a man and a woman on the ballot.

4:40

Now, the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar may have some concerns about this in regard to what happens with people with alternative lifestyles. Well, he can get up and he can debate the whole idea. That's his prerogative. Participate in the debate like the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. We need more distinguished elegant voices like the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford's in the Assembly.

With an Assembly that had gender balance, perhaps we would have different views on a number of issues: public education, public health care. I'm going to bet – and people can correct me – that a lot more mothers visit the classrooms of this province than fathers. Fathers are usually working away from the home. We have a high percentage of the workforce that works out of town. Mothers know firsthand classroom conditions because of the visits to the classrooms.

Women are also the primary caregivers in families to elderly family members. As a result of that, they visit hospitals and doctors perhaps more often than male members of the family, and they have a different understanding of how our public health care system does or does not work.

Those are just two examples. Perhaps with a simple amendment like that we would have gender balance in this Assembly, and perhaps we would have better laws, and as a result of that we'd have a better democracy. Now, this is one idea that perhaps could be debated across this province if we were to vote in favour of amendment A1.

I don't think, in conclusion, Mr. Chairman, that we can wait for another time. Now is the time to implement real democratic change in Alberta. The government may not see anything wrong with the system, but others do. When I travel, when I go to rural Alberta and I go to Calgary, democratic reform is one of the issues that citizens want discussed, and they express frustration over this first past the post system that we have.

Perhaps this commission – let's call it a commission – could look at having proportional representation. Proportional representation is certainly something that this member could adjust to. I think, in fact, we would strengthen democracy. The more different voices that are heard in this Assembly, the better off we would be. We could hear, for instance, the voices of the environmentalists through the Green Party. We could hear the voices of the Alberta Alliance and Social Credit. I think those voices would add to this Assembly and add to the political debate. So, in that case, I think the more the merrier, Mr. Chairman. All this could be discussed if we vote for this amendment.

I would urge all hon. members in the interest of democratic renewal in this province to please consider this amendment in a positive light. Vote for it, support it, and we, too, can improve our democracy.

There are too many good ideas to be discussed by one speaker, so I will cede the floor to an hon. colleague. Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

**Ms Haley:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I did want to just

get up and make a couple of comments, and I'll be brief so that my colleague from that side can also participate in this discussion.

I did want to say to start off with that I, sadly, won't be supporting this amendment, but I wanted to make some comments about it, and I wanted to start off by saying that every recommendation that's in this bill has come to us from the Chief Electoral Officer, who went out and did quite a lot of work to come up with things that he believes would make the election process more effective, more efficient, and more fair to people that not only work in the polls but people that need to go vote; for example, people that want to vote in an advance poll. The rules will be much more simplified now so that we can accommodate those people that are going to be away or may just know that they can't get there that day. There are a lot of really great things in this bill that I would hope that people would support.

Specifically to the amendment and the idea of yet another commission – and you know what? Maybe down the road at some point we should be looking at all of these things, but I do want to make some comments.

When you talk about recall, the first thing that comes to mind is the fact that Premier William Aberhart was the one that was in fact subject to a recall petition. In British Columbia, where they brought in this rule, the very first thing that everybody tried to do was go after Gordon Campbell. I'm not sure that the effect of this is actually that they've done something wrong or that they don't deserve to be MLAs any more as much as it is that it's an opportunity for everybody to play games with the system.

I really resent that because it's very difficult as an individual to give up a big chunk of your life to run for office and try and come here only to have somebody that didn't win an election against you in your own riding all of a sudden start playing games with the electoral process. I think there's a lot of risk in that, and there's a lot of downside, and we need to be very careful when we talk about that.

Another issue that was raised was gender balance, and I don't even know what that means. My God, we live in the 21st century in the most modern province in the entire world. Nobody can compete with us on anything, and to think that the only way that we can get women in here is to have some kind of gender balance is offensive to me as a woman. I ran against five men and won. I've had no problem doing that three times in a row, whether it was a nomination or an election, and if I run again and if I win again, it will be against other men, and I don't care. I don't care that it's against men.

I believe I have a message, and my message to my constituents is that I am going to come here and I am going to work myself practically to death to try and do everything that I can to meet their needs, to do the things that they've asked me to do. Whether it's to try and deal with mould in a school or to deal with an overpass at the north end of Airdrie or lights at Bearspaw, I do exactly what it is they ask me to do.

I don't need anybody out there making it easier for me to get here. I worked hard to get here. I want to believe that I deserve to be here and that somebody didn't hand me a gift and say: okay; you go because you're a woman. No. I want to go because I'm the right person for the job, because I work hard, and I have a right to be here. This is not a Third World nation. This is the most modern nation in the world, and we have so much to be proud of. [interjection] I'm just responding to you, hon. member, because you're the one that brought it up.

When you talk about term limits, let's be very clear. There are term limits. The limit to a term is when an election is called. Every single time there's an election called, which have been miraculously four years apart here in Alberta, the people then go to the polls and they decide if they want you back or not. The idea of having a term limit is to get rid of somebody that you can't get rid of because

you're not good enough to beat me. That's the reality. So when you get a good candidate and he beats me, my limit is up. That's it. There's no need for there to be a law that says that Carol can only be there for four years because it would be much better for Airdrie-Rocky View if she wasn't there. The people of my riding will decide. You don't need some arbitrary, unilateral law that makes that decision.

Proportional representation, with all due respect, is for parties who can't mount a good campaign, that don't do a good job for four years raising funds to get enough money to run an election properly in this province or anywhere. [interjection] Oh, and the big unions aren't in your pocket, Mr. Mason.

**Mr. Mason:** They're really small.

**Ms Haley:** Really small little ones. Yeah. Well, nevertheless, in every other part of Canada the unions support the left-wing parties. They don't support us, and they never have. [interjection] You want to get up and give a speech? Can I give mine first? Would that be okay?

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. member, I just wish to caution on a couple of things. It would help if the debate goes through the chair, and secondly, I hope that you will respect the tradition that we have of not mentioning people by name.

4:50

**Ms Haley:** I will not do it again, Mr. Chairman.

**The Deputy Chair:** You may proceed now, hon. member.

**Ms Haley:** Thank you. With regard to proportional representation generally speaking that is just something that is absolutely not necessary in Alberta. People here choose which party they want to support. They choose which party they want to belong to. They can buy a membership, they can make a campaign contribution, and they can run.

I ran against five or six parties; they are all out there. It is not my fault if the people didn't vote for them. I do not know why I have to feel bad that the people of Alberta supported my government and my party. That is how elections work. In the next election it might be vastly different, and that is okay too because that is democracy at its absolute best.

So, you know, Mr. Chairman, with all the greatest respect in the world to my colleagues across the way I will not support this amendment. I would strongly encourage my colleagues not to support this amendment. One day, when all calmer heads prevail, perhaps we can have an intelligent discussion on why there should be electoral reform or what path it should take if, indeed, it should take anything other than what we've got. Winston Churchill said it best when he said on watching parliamentary democracy: it may be the worst system in the world, but it is better than anything else that there is out there. I believe that.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you. Mr. Chairman, I'm pleased to rise to speak to amendment A1, which has been put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. I will be supporting this, not because I have agreed with every possibility that's been raised by that hon. member or others for the ultimate outcome of this but because I believe that it is a good process.



I don't think that there's any advantage in this discussion to personalize this in the sense of taking it as an attempt to drive out any particular member from this Assembly. Nor do I think it's valuable to politicize the discussion by talking about the party in power and its ability to raise more money than the other political parties. I don't think that's what this is about at all.

One of the advantages of the British parliamentary system, Mr. Chairman, is that it is not carved in stone in the sense of a rigid constitutional description of how the system is exactly supposed to work. Its greatest strength is that it is an evolutionary system that changes with the times. It's not based fundamentally on fixed and permanent rules but on traditions, and those traditions have been allowed to evolve. Where the system will break down and stop being a progressive democratic system is when we try to fetter it and to say that it's been this way for the last 20 years, the last 50 years, or the last 100 years and we don't want to see any further change to the system.

I think there are a number of very good ideas that can be brought forward. I agree, believe it or not, with the hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View on some of her criticisms of some of the ideas that have been put forward as potential outcomes. I particularly think that recall has been abused.

The most recent example of that was in the situation in California, where for very political reasons related to the role of California in the American presidential elections, this was undertaken and extremely well financed by large right-wing organizations that have millions and millions of dollars to spend on this. It was them that organized the recall of the governor of California and his replacement with a movie actor of some renown but very little political experience. So I agree with that issue.

I'm not necessarily committed to term limits. I certainly think that ultimately it's the voters that should determine who represents them and not some arbitrary rule.

I also have some considerable problem with the idea of citizens' initiatives. We can see how citizens' initiatives have hamstrung California and prevented the government from either increasing taxes or cutting many of the services. It has reduced the ability of the government of California to effectively put in place political agendas, which is what politics is all about.

In fact, Mr. Chairman, I would say that California has become the poster child for the failure of the three Rs that were so famous a number of years ago. If I can recall all of the Rs, I think they were recall, referendum, and – what's the other one? Well, it's initiatives, but I don't know if there's an R word for that.

California has, I think, shown people that were rushing to emulate some of the American political experience that it's not all that it's cracked up to be.

Let's take a look at some of the things that could come out of it. One of the most significant changes that I think is on the political horizon in Canada and partly because of what the B.C. government has done is the whole question of proportional representation. Believe it or not, there's a system called mixed member proportional representation that allows the seats in an Assembly or a parliament to be allocated according to the popular vote in the same proportion but also to include geographical districts or constituencies or ridings within the Assembly, so people are represented geographically but in the same proportion as the vote was as a whole.

This is something whose time has come. It's only a matter of time. I don't think it will be long before this is implemented someplace in Canada, and it may well be in British Columbia. It's a far more democratic system than we have now. You know, people that are in favour of it here in Alberta, because it has increased the representation of the governing party, have at the same time been

very critical of it in the federal system because it's had the same effect with the federal Liberal government in Canada.

The point is, Mr. Chairman, that you can't just decide these issues depending on which particular party is advantaged by it in a particular jurisdiction at a particular time. You have to look at it in a broader sense, in a more objective sense, and I think that's what we need to do. I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is right that the place would be improved by a greater range of voices.

Another aspect that I would like to deal with is the aspect of fixed election times. I cannot for the life of me understand why we have a system in which the Premier or the Prime Minister, the leader of the governing party, gets in their sole discretion to determine the election date. That's not fair to the other political parties, and it's not fair to the public. The public has a right to know when the elections are going to be. That system has been in place in other countries, and it's in place right here in Alberta because, of course, we have fixed election days for municipal elections and always have had, and that works just fine.

The only reason for the system in which the Premier or the Prime Minister can call an election is to give an even greater advantage to the governing party than they already have. It's not sufficient that they just have their hands on all the levers of power and all the resources of the community, but then they get to pick an election at a time in which they have some specific advantage and their opponents have a disadvantage. That's just not the right way to do it, and there's no good argument to be made for that as a constitutional position. So unless the government actually falls on a question of confidence, I think there are lots of reasons to have fixed election dates.

5:00

There are any number of other things, I think, that could be developed or considered by a commission along the lines which are suggested in this amendment. I think that the experience of British Columbia is a very interesting one. It's not a question of election, and it's not a suggestion, as the Member for Airdrie-Rocky View suggested, that it's reverse sexism because it's not an election. Nobody is suggesting, I think, that the principle of one man, one woman would be applied to a Legislative Assembly because that would be taking away rights from the voters, but I do in fact think that in this case, where people are not elected, it makes sense and has considerable merit.

The last point I want to make, Mr. Chairman, has to do with election finance, because that was also raised by that hon. member, and there needs to be a lot of attention paid to this. Again, if we look at the United States example, we see the role that money has begun to play in politics, where it is absolutely the most dominant factor, and enormous sums are spent on elections. This, of course, empowers those people who have a great deal of money, and that in itself is a political decision.

We have the spectacle, I guess I would call it, of the Democratic Party in the United States going through the primary system where the criteria seems to be that people are knocked out as the primary season progresses by their inability to continue to raise funds. That means that you have these large financial contributors, mostly large corporations and the packs that are organized by special interests, basically betting – they're speculating financially – on which candidates are going to win. As the primaries and the caucuses progress, they shift their money to people that look like they have a greater potential to win, and they cease funding people who can't.

That's not the kind of system that I think produces any sort of democratic result. That is shifting the ability to select the presidential candidate from both parties in the United States into the hands

of monied interests, and that is wrong. That is not in the interests of democracy. In fact, it's contrary to the very concept of democracy.

We have this situation in Canada as well to a much lesser extent, but clearly there is a need for some sort of reform of election financing in Alberta perhaps along the lines of that adopted at the federal level, where they have passed a law which prohibits donations from corporations and unions. They've followed the model set in Manitoba.

Now, Mr. Chairman, politics is about the interests of people. It's not about the interests of corporations, and it's not about the interests of unions. It should be about the interests of people. Whether they sit on a corporate board or are a shop steward in a plant, they have rights as citizens and they have obligations to participate in our democratic process as citizens, and I believe that has got to be reflected in how we finance and pay for our politics. So if the federal government can do it, if Manitoba can do it, if they can eliminate funding both by corporations and unions, then I think they are taking a major step at putting the power back in the hands of the people to direct our democratic system, and that's really what it should be all about. So I appreciate that.

I certainly appreciated the comments of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. I would just express a fear, however, that if it's defeated here, if the amendment to the bill is defeated, we may never see a separate, stand-alone motion come forward with any prospect of success. That is based, unfortunately, on my experience in this place.

I would urge all hon. members who want to see a further development and evolution of our parliamentary system to support this motion. If it were passed, it would unleash the evolutionary process, which I think is latent in our parliamentary system. I think that only a progressive evolution will really meet the needs of Alberta's citizens into the 21st century.

So I would commend the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for introducing this amendment, and I will fully support it, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

**Mr. Rathgeber:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It is indeed a pleasure for me to rise and add a few comments. I encourage all members to vote against the amendment as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, and I have a few comments with regard to the arguments that have been spoken in favour of this amendment.

Firstly, with respect to fixed elections I think it's important that we as legislators understand a very simple matter of constitutional law. Under the British parliamentary system, we indeed do not elect our governments; we only elect our legislators. The government is chosen by the Lieutenant Governor or the Governor General. Typically, it's the leader of the party that holds the most seats in the Legislature or in Parliament, as the case may be, but as citizens in a British parliamentary system we do not directly elect our governments. We elect our legislators and our legislators only.

This is a fundamental difference between the British parliamentary system and the American republican system. In the United States of America, where there are fixed-term elections, it's the second Tuesday of every fourth November that an election is held. But they have the ability to directly cast a vote in favour of the executive member of their choice, whether it be a governor or whether it be the President. So the systems are different.

We have inherited 800-plus years of British parliamentary tradition where the prerogative for calling an election, with all due respect to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands, does not rest with

the Premier and does not rest with the Prime Minister. Ultimately, it rests with the Governor General or with the Lieutenant Governor, as the case may be.

Students of Canadian history will recall a situation in the mid-20th century when Lord Byng denied then Prime Minister Mackenzie King the ability to dissolve Parliament and call an election. Historians have referred to this incident as the King/Byng thing. It was an interesting anecdote in Canadian constitutional history. Prime Minister Mackenzie King, just having had an election and having won a minority government, lost a vote of confidence in the House and went to the Governor General and asked for Parliament to be dissolved and to go back to the electorate to seek a fresh mandate. Lord Byng – incidentally, his wife, Lady Byng, has an NHL trophy awarded after her, but I digress – declared that since a federal election had just been held, he was going to use his prerogative and the prerogative that rests in the Crown and not call an election.

He asked the Leader of the Opposition of that day, a man by the name of Arthur Meighen, to attempt to form a government. He did attempt to form a government, and similarly lost a vote of confidence in the House. He went to the Governor General. They did dissolve Parliament, called an election, and Mackenzie King was returned with an overwhelming majority.

The point of this story is that it created a bit of a constitutional crisis in Canadian history, and both legal scholars and political scholars have commented on it. It reinforces one simple fact: we do not elect our governments, we only elect our legislators, and it is the prerogative of the Crown or the Crown's representative to decide when an election is appropriate.

It is appropriate under certain terms or in certain situations that a Premier or a Prime Minister, as the case might be, should visit with the Lieutenant Governor or the Governor General and petition that the Legislature be dissolved. For example, the most common one is when a government loses a vote of confidence. An equally important one is when the government is about to embark on what is seen to be a digression from a certain policy, that might require a significant amount of public debate.

#### 5:10

If a government feels that it's going to introduce legislation that might be controversial or might be deemed a marked departure from the former way of doing things, they may feel the need to seek a fresh mandate. Often a Premier or a Prime Minister will change through a legislative term, and often the new Premier or Prime Minister, as the case may be, may feel obliged to seek a mandate from the people before he or she introduces legislation that may be a departure from its predecessor.

I think we see that in Ottawa right now where there's a new Prime Minister, and I think quite legitimately that Prime Minister feels the need to seek a fresh mandate from the people. So he may this spring – and we've heard rumours of this – seek a fresh mandate, and we will have a parliamentary election or at least a House of Commons election well in advance of four years of the previous one, which was called in November of 2000.

So I think that fixed elections are a bad idea. There are situations when it is necessary to call an election, so I'm certainly in favour of leaving that prerogative with the Lieutenant Governor or the Governor General and the Executive Council, which provides him or her with advice.

With respect to term limits I similarly have some problems. I believe that fundamentally they're antidemocratic. If you're told as a member of the Assembly or as a member of the Executive Council that you can only serve two terms or three terms regardless of your

capabilities, regardless of the job that you've done, and most importantly, regardless of how the people judge the job that you've done, you've created an inherently antidemocratic system, where the people might want candidate A or Premier A to continue into a third or fourth term but are prohibited by statute from returning that individual to their respective office. That is completely undemocratic.

We as legislators must be careful that we always attract the most capable and the most competent people to positions of higher office. If the population is comfortable that a certain individual has been placed in that office and if they wish to continue to be put in that office, certainly they shouldn't be prohibited by a statute of that Legislature from continuing to carry on. So I certainly do not agree with term limits on any member of the Legislature or any member of the Executive Council.

I just want to say, Mr. Chairman, a couple of comments about proportional representation. I think that we must always remain mindful as legislators that we have inherited 800-plus years of British parliamentary tradition. The first past the post system has certainly been inherited from the British House of Commons, and it is used with mixed success in virtually all Commonwealth countries and all provinces within those Commonwealth countries. I think it has served us well.

We've heard some suggestion that we'd be better off going to a proportional representation system or that we'd be better off going to a mixed system where some members were elected by proportional representation and some were elected by single plurality seats. I would submit to you, Mr. Chairman, that those experiments for the most part have failed other jurisdictions. Any members who have followed European politics, especially western European politics, will see nothing but complete instability within the Legislatures that have elected representatives to the Legislature by proportional representation systems.

I had the opportunity to tour Northern Ireland on a parliamentary mission approximately two years ago with the Speaker and about seven or eight other members of this Assembly. It was quite fascinating to see how proportional representation worked in Northern Ireland. I didn't make notes because I didn't know I was going to be speaking to this. The Irish Parliament elected at least eight or nine different parties to a Legislature that had about 50-some members. Of course, no party had anywhere close to a majority. So the executive was chosen from four parties within that Legislature; you had a coalition not of two but of four parties.

Well, this Legislature was so dysfunctional. It was hamstrung virtually from the beginning and in a matter of six or eight months passed the grand total of, I think, zero pieces of legislation, could not get a budget passed, and basically all it ever debated was whether or not Northern Ireland should stay in the United Kingdom or whether it should form its own independent state, which was not part of its constitutional mandate. They were supposed to run highways and roads and hospitals.

The point of this anecdote is that Stormont, the beautiful House in Belfast, was so dysfunctional that it was ultimately closed down by the secretary of state for Northern Ireland in London because it just could not operate. Northern Ireland went back to direct rule under Westminster, under the Parliament of London, because this Parliament was such a disaster.

Other states have tried it. We've seen proportional representation in Germany and in some of the other western European states, and I think their experience has been similar. Proportional representation leads to a multiplicity of parties, it leads to instability, and often the Legislature is hamstrung and cannot pass legislation. Governments fail with great regularity, and those that survive find that their

ability to pass legislation is handcuffed. So I'm not a proponent of proportional representation.

Finally, with respect to recall and citizens' initiative, I do agree with the Member for Edmonton-Highlands. I think California has shown that these very well-intended and philosophically admirable positions and experiments work better on paper than they do in practice. Certainly, special interest groups and those with a lot of money are able to dominate citizens' initiatives. Recall legislation? I cannot support it. Those of us who are elected to these Legislatures are occasionally called upon to make tough, difficult decisions, and if each one of those decisions individually is going to be subject to that kind of scrutiny by our electorate, we'll be scared to take on the tough choices because the stability of our position will be called into jeopardy.

I think the system, for the most part, works as it is. We're called on to make decisions. We're here. We're paid well to come and to read the material and to listen to the debate and to thereafter cast an intelligent vote either for or against a motion or for or against a piece of legislation.

I think it's most inappropriate that you elect a legislator, have him or her come here, listen to the debate, read the briefing materials, and then have each one of those individual decisions potentially subject to recall by a member of the public, who presumably is not as informed as the member because presumably the member is informed because that's what they're paid to do. I do not believe in a system of democracy where one group of individuals are paid and charged with making legislation and another one actually has the ultimate rule.

We have to be accountable, and we have to be judged, and that is why we go to the polls every four, every four and a half, every five years, and we have the electorate decide on how the government has performed and how the legislators have performed, not on single pieces of legislation or on single pieces of initiative but on the totality of that legislator's record or on the totality of that government's record.

So this system is tried and true. We inherited it from Great Britain some 800 years ago. It has quirks, it has problems, but I think for the most part it works.

For all of those reasons I will be voting against the amendment to Bill 22.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

5:20

**Dr. Nicol:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise today to speak to the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2004, and talk about some of the issues that I see as being significant. What I want to do is just kind of address the whole issue of whether or not this amendment to the bill is appropriate, fits in.

I think we need to look initially at a lot of the arguments that were made by the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford in the sense of this is something that has a real appeal to it, that the scope of this amendment in itself shouldn't even be debated here in this Legislature in terms of what changes in our democratic system should be initiated, talked about. That's the kind of mandate that this amendment should give to this citizens' commission, and that way we can then allow for the true evolution of our democracy to be determined by the people of this province.

I sat and listened to a lot of the debate where the people would come up and talk about specific characteristics that may need change or may not need change and whether or not it's good or whether or not some particular aspect of our current democracy is not good.

This is the kind of thing that we shouldn't be doing here as part of the debate on this amendment. What we should be doing is: is it appropriate for us in the context of an election statutes amendment act to be asking for a citizens' group to be formed so that we can effectively go out and truly bring together the debate about specific characteristics of our democracy and whether or not they are good or bad or need to be changed?

This is why it's so important that we look at this in the context of: are we in a position to evolve our democracy? I agree with the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. You know, we shouldn't be calling it electoral reform. We shouldn't be calling it anything, because what we're trying to do is take a good system and make it even better. We're trying to make it evolve into something that suits the needs of our citizenry so that they feel enhanced by it, they feel that it is their democracy, and they feel that it is the kind of process that makes their decisions be reflected in the actions of the Legislature.

When we start talking about individual aspects of what should be changed and what should not be changed as part of the debate about supporting this amendment or not supporting this amendment, we, in effect, are pre-empting the prerogative that we're trying to assign to this committee. So I think that we need to look at it from the point of view of: do we want our democracy to be constantly evolving to meet the needs, meet the expectations of Albertans?

I really want to focus on the concept of expectations because we have to make sure that Albertans have the opportunity to say: this is the process we want to follow; this is the process that we would be excited about allowing to make our decisions. This is the kind of thing that would encourage them to go out and increase their participation, encourage them to in many ways accept the actions of their legislation. You know, so many times we hear people say: well, it didn't speak on my behalf.

I think this goes back to the comments that were made before, that in the end democracy means that everybody gets to express their opinion, but once the decision is made, democracy can only thrive, democracy can only move forward when the minority says: I had my say; I had a chance to have input; now we have to move on. That's what's so critical about a true reflection of evolution of our democracy.

Mr. Chairman, if we weren't in a position to try and make our democracy work more effectively for us, instill confidence in that democracy in a broad base of Albertans, why would we even have Bill 22 here? If we're going to say the current system absolutely works, we don't need changes, then why do we need the bill?

By bringing forward Bill 22, we are saying on behalf of Albertans: we think the electoral process can improve. So we have an election statutes amendment act to improve that system, to evolve that system into something that in effect reflects both modern communication mechanisms, modern technologies, the dynamics of our society now. Do we need an ID number that follows us so that if we do move from

one part of the province to the other, we don't end up with the potential to vote twice?

You know, that's the kind of thing that this bill is talking about. It's talking about an evolution in our democracy. Yet what we're saying now with this amendment A1 is: yes, but Albertans should be the ones that are coming forward, being consulted, being brought into the position of making their – their – democracy work. What's so important is the buy-in of the citizenry, the buy-in by all of the people out there so that when they do go cast a ballot, they feel that it's their system, it's their approach, it's their process, it's their government when they're done. That's what's so important about the idea of this citizens' assembly that we've been talking about. It lets them bring forward the whole broad spectrum of the kind of issues they want to talk about.

We can sit here and make a list, and Albertans can take things off that list; they can add more things to it. But the most important thing is: let's not bog down in a definition of whether or not certain aspects of our democracy need to be improved, need to be changed, need to be redone right now.

Let's basically say: the important thing about this amendment is that it will give citizens in our province a chance to come forward and be part of a change, part of an evolution in our democracy, because nothing, Mr. Chairman, should be considered so immovable, so absolute, that it doesn't need to be reviewed, that it doesn't need to be dealt with in the context of expectations of our citizens and the opportunities for democracy to function. So that's one of the things that we have to make sure of, that we keep moving, that we make sure that citizens are brought into this.

By having two individuals from each constituency come together, we're really giving a grassroots contact to this process. We're giving a process that appears to be, and in fact would be, more independent than we could deal with here. In some of the discussions we've already heard that the first reaction that kind of reflected through the floor was: oh, protecting our own turf, protecting our own ideas, protecting our own position. If we have people outside this Legislature talk about the changes they want to be put in place in our democracy, then what we will have is in effect nobody saying that there's any kind of a self-interest, there's any kind of a self-preservation in it. That would reflect how to deal with this kind of change, this kind of an approach.

We have to make sure that this amendment gives Albertans that chance to be participatory.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, as per Standing Order 4(3) the Committee of the Whole now stands adjourned until 8 p.m., at which time it will reconvene.

[The committee adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]